“You went there for the people and went there for the bands”

The Sandringham Hotel – 1980 to 1998

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I sincerely thank and dedicate this project to all the participants in this study whose enthusiasm for the place, its people and music made the whole thing meaningful.
Declaration

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of the requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged in the text

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help I have received in my research work and preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Candidate Signature: .................................................................
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Abstract

The Sandringham Hotel, situated at 387 King Street, Newtown is recognised as one of the main pub rock institutions in inner Sydney. Bands began playing there in 1980 and continued, eventually seven-nights-a-week, until 1998. This study surveys the popular music-making activity at the site across those years, following a historically oriented narrative. In 1998 the place was extensively renovated and the unique architecture and management principals that supported the vibrant music-making culture were substantially changed. As a result, the community of regular patrons who closely identified with the site dispersed.

The study aims to provide a history of this diverse community built around this urban music-making site, through one-on-one interviews with key participants in the building and maintenance of that unique culture. Interviewees were chosen from four identified roles of engagement with the site, being either owner/manager, musician, staff or patron. Defining the boundaries of these roles became problematic throughout the length of the study, however, as the process of personal identification with the site, and the particular ethos of the place became apparent in the analysis.

The study is also informed by my close association with the hotel over many of the years covered. I worked as a barman there between 1994 and 1996, visited the hotel to see bands from 1986, and performed there regularly from 1992 until 1998. This close knowledge of the site provided access to key participants and also assisted in the understanding of the performance and work rituals practiced there. My role as insider researcher is also critiqued via relevant literature.

Through analysis of the narratives offered by the 25 interviewees, the thesis explores issues around the formation of identity at the site, and how participants in the culture came to regard the place as their own. The ‘feeling of community’ expressed by all interviewees will be discussed through reference to relevant literature and held against the more fluid ideas of what ‘community’ symbolises in studies concerned with group identification. Rituals instigated and maintained at the site are analysed with a view to understanding how participation in regular community events
deepened the sense of belonging to the site expressed in the interviews. These three key investigative themes, namely ‘identity’, ‘community’ and ‘ritual’ are recurrent throughout the narrative, along with the idea of a ‘place’ based music-making scene.

The study is divided into the three main areas in which the identification and contestation of these themes played out. The areas are the people, the place, and the songs from bands closely identified with the venue. After the first chapter that outlines the methodological approach, and a review of literature relevant to the various areas of academic investigation pertinent to the study, these three areas form the body of the thesis.

Chapter two looks at the community that participants felt connected to at the site. The discussion analyses narratives concerned with group identification and interaction, showing community to be a contested notion even though individuals closely identified with the group referred to it as universal. Chapter three focuses on the materiality of the site, particularly the makeshift stage. The thesis argues that the unique architecture of the site had a significant influence on the way people interacted with the ritual processes enacted there, and therefore on the feelings and emotions that built a close identification with the place. By analysing the position of the stage within the internal architecture, the daily process of building and unbuilding the stage, and the particular materials that constituted the stage, a clearer idea of the physical elements of the site and the way they influenced the culture emerges. Chapter four looks at several songs written by people associated with the site, and performed by bands affiliated with the diverse culture of music-making situated there. This analysis follows musicological but also anthropological lines of investigation, not limiting the discussion to the sound and structure of the songs themselves. The influences for the compositions, the personal interactions of people who performed them, as well as the meanings associated with participation in performances by audience members are discussed and analysed.

This study fills an identified gap in academic literature concerned with local popular music-making practices in an urban context. It also provides the first concentrated oral history based documentation of a particular place important to popular music production and consumption in Australia, at a time when various legal and
demographic changes were having a deleterious effect on such places nationally. The analysis and discussion in the study aims to facilitate better understanding of the way people connect to music-making places and practices, and, in turn, lead to more intelligently designed cultural spaces that offer open and enthusiastic participation by diverse groups in our society. I also hope the study leads to greater interest and support for community based music-making practices by relevant institutions and authorities.
Introduction

But who is looking after the breeding grounds, the grasses at the end of the creek where you find the little fish feeding, the place from which a culture can grow with safety and strength? This is what needs our attention now (Armfield, 2007: 336).

One day, sometime in 1995, the bar manager of the Sandringham Hotel, Newtown suggested that it would be good to read a history of the place we both then worked in. For ten years up until that day the small shop-front hotel had been the venue for live music performances every night, and, for the five years before that, music had filled the pub from Wednesday to Saturday each week. During that time, up until 1998, the hotel had built a highly productive music-making scene that saw many bands form and develop into nationally and internationally touring acts, but more importantly, it supported many that enjoyed local support. As the quote above suggests, the Sandringham was a breeding ground for local music-makers. Many bands played their first gigs at the venue and it operated as a gateway to the wider, inner Sydney pub rock scene. It is this support for, and production of, a local music-making place that the study is keenly interested in. The hotel employed many musicians and artists as bar staff, and the place became a busy social hub for a wider community of music makers and supporters. This project seeks to write an oral history of the place during that time and does this principally through interviews with key participants in the culture of music-making that developed there.

I began the process with a strong belief that something significant had happened in relation to the production and consumption of popular music at the place between those years. As a musician who had played at this venue, and many other venues in inner Sydney (and around Australia) I thought this hotel stood apart from others in that it supported a unique cultural space not replicated in other pubs. By interviewing participants in the scene from the time, and including in these interviewees people from various levels of engagement with the site, I hoped a comprehensive narrative of the various conditions that supported and sustained the site across those years.
would emerge. Included in the analysis of these interviews are my memories of having performed, worked and socialised there over many years. As an insider researcher access to interviewees and site-specific knowledge of the place informs the expressed views of those interviewed, but this travels with an acknowledgement and understanding of the pitfalls of proximity to research conducted so close to home. The Sandringham Hotel, or Sando (see Figure 1) as it came to be locally

Figure 1 – The Sandringham Hotel, 387 King St, Newtown (circa 1990).
known, was one of a handful of inner Sydney hotels that offered live entertainment every night of the week. In 1998, in what in part was a result of the increasing gentrification of the area and its surrounding suburbs (Gibson & Homan, 2004), the operating objectives of the management changed and this led to a significant hotel refurbishment that altered the then unique internal layout. This refurbishment and management changes had a detrimental impact on the culture of music-making that had previously flourished there and the venue, although still in operation, no longer supports nightly entertainment. According to the interviewees it now lacks the unique characteristics that attracted them (and me) to the place.

This project is important in that it is the first interview-based study to focus on one venue across one period of time, and because it aims to provide a historical account of popular music-making situated at the place. In particular it focuses on issues of ‘ritual’, ‘community’ and ‘place’, and how people identified with and expressed a ‘feeling of community’ through their involvement in regular events held there. In doing so the study fills a gap in the existing literature concerned with the production of live music-making in Australia. Further to this, being a historical narrative built on the memories of participants in the culture, the project also looks to identify the contexts in which popular music was made at the time. As the interview narratives unfold, I look to define the particular elements that went to sustain the culturally vibrant space with a view to mapping their influence and identifying the outcomes brought about by the flow of these elements on and through the people who frequented the site. Through an analysis of these elements and their contexts the project aims to offer a historically-orientated narrative of this particular place.

As other studies have found (Homan, 2000) the pub rock tradition in inner Sydney is under threat of disappearing. The combined forces of gentrification in Sydney’s inner-western suburbs, and the increasing interventions of laws concerning alcohol service and fire regulations have put pressure on smaller hotel profitability. Considering also the greater reliance on gambling-based incomes by entertainment venues, and the changing demographics of the communities that were drawn to the areas these venues operated in, many of the hotels that once offered musicians a place to play no longer support this locally-based music-making culture. As the Sandringham was subject to these social, economic and political forces this study
aims to capture a picture of the demise of one of “the main pub rock institutions in inner Sydney” (Gibson & Homan, 2004: 11). It is hoped this picture can be used to better understand and therefore negotiate the changing processes that continue to impact culturally productive places in Australian urban areas.

The three areas where the themes of ‘ritual’, ‘identity’, ‘community’ and ‘place’ play out in this study are found in the thesis title quote, from an interview with staff member and regular patron Murray Rees: “you wouldn’t go there for the pub itself, you went there for the people and went there for the bands” - the people who frequented the site, the music that was played and enjoyed there, and the physical site itself. Therefore the study comprises three large sections each concerned with one of these, as well as a chapter on methodology combined with a literature review. In the remaining sections of this Introduction, I will discuss the aims of the study, its context, and why the study is important to the better understanding of popular music-making places in Australia at the time covered by the study. Chapter one combines the methodology of the study with a review of literature influential to the research, looking for methodologies and findings in the broad range of academic disciplines concerned with popular music and place. These include writings from cultural theorists, anthropologists, ethnomusicologists, human geographers, historians and ethnographers. Because this type of study has not previously been conducted, the influences for it are necessarily broad, looking for the areas in each discipline that inform the methodological choices taken.

Chapter two concentrates on the ‘feeling of community’ expressed by the interviewees for the study. The various ideas of what constitutes a ‘community’ in the minds of the interviewees are discussed with particular reference to Turner’s (1969) idea of communitas and certain rituals that were instituted and continued for the life of the venue until 1998. How the site was managed with relation to the needs of the local community is discussed and also how notions of diversity within that community were negotiated and contested. This section includes a look at the diversity of musical styles supported by the Sandringham community, something not seen in other research on single music-making venues. The hotel experienced the demographic shifts evident in other inner-city suburbs at the time and the effects on the people at the site are explored, along with how people’s close identification with
the place led them to see it as an extension of their home space. How the size and shape of the room affected the way people socialised there is discussed as are the ways in which music became a connecting agent in this social interplay. The place became a site where community information was mediated and transferred and, despite ‘feelings of community’, conflicts between participants in the music-making culture were played out there.

Charter three looks at the unique makeshift stage from which the performances took place, and how the materials that constituted the stage played a role in how music-making came to be a participatory process for those who engaged with the place. No study I can find makes an assessment of the material reality of a live music venue and this architectural aspect of the way music was presented had implications for the experience and effectiveness of performances in the minds of performers, patrons and staff. That the stage was built by performers prior to each nightly show was seen as significant and the various ways interviewees understood and interacted with this process is discussed. The physical materials that constituted the stage are analysed in relation to the ethos of the place.

Chapter four analyses interview responses from songwriters who frequented the hotel and takes a sustained look at songs found to be linked to the site. Songwriters take influence from broad experiences and often important influences remain unacknowledged in the artistic output of practicing musicians. This chapter, in part, surveys the practices of several of the songwriters who performed and socialised at the hotel regularly, looking for ways in which the place became significant in their practice. One song in particular was seen by interviewees as an ‘anthem’ for the place, and was the last song performed when the hotel closed in October 1998. The lyrics, melodic structure, and chord progression are discussed in relation to the ways this song was performed. Experiences of participation in the performance of the song by patrons are assessed here and a longer discussion on ways in which songs could be seen to build a notion of place also. Other songs allude to the place tangentially, and these links are explored through analysis of their musicological attributes, their writing and recording, and through the personal interplay of the people who wrote and performed these songs. The thesis conclusion draws findings from the analysis
and discussions in the previous three chapters, and suggests areas where further study could be undertaken.
Chapter One

Methodology and Literature Review

Introduction

The pub rock music scene in Australia has played a significant role in our understanding of national popular music-making processes. The study employs a qualitative methodology, focussed on interviews with people who inhabited the site over the period covered. This chapter describes the participants in this study, the form of the interviews, data analysis and ethical issues. Researching and writing about a contemporary music-making place from the recent past requires an approach which offers a multifaceted but clear evocation of the place itself in the mind of the reader, but also one that elucidates some of the socio-cultural issues that arise when discussing community-based music-making practices. When the researcher was an ‘insider’ during the period researched, as I was, certain issues need to be addressed.

The chapter will also review literature concerned with researching popular music practices, including writings on the Australian popular music scene which are drawn from anthropological, cultural studies, sociological, ethnographic and musicological writings. Because the researcher in this study is an insider, it includes literature on the placement of the insider, with a focus on the researcher as an active participant in the scene being described. As this literature is reviewed, relevant aspects having parallels with the Sandringham study, and their specific uses at the site, are discussed.

Method

This study began because I felt there had been music-making worthy of attention taking place at the Sandringham Hotel over the years 1980, when bands began playing there, to 1998, when the venue closed for renovation. I also began this study with little idea of the deeper, cultural and sociological underpinnings of popular music studies that would give the data meaning in a broader context. Having played at many venues in Sydney, I recognised the unique place the Sandringham held in
the minds of those who performed, worked and socialised there. I wanted to know how the place ‘built’ itself in the minds of these people. The research was grounded in a qualitative ethnographic methodology drawing on aspects of existing ethnographic research discussed later in this chapter. As ‘closed’ questions “tend to impose a researcher’s own framework of ideas” (O'Reilly, 2005:120) on the data gathered, and therefore onto the analysis of the data, open-ended questions asked in (mostly) one-to-one interviews allowed a free flow of personal information. The open questions offered the interviewees an opportunity to express their thoughts and feelings about the place in the company of someone they either knew at the time, or someone who knew the place and could recognise and reflect the details that underpinned the stories narrated.

The interviews were conducted over a period of one and a half years, from May 2007 to October 2008.

Participants

Writing about the recent past allows opportunities for oral history collection. Initial interviewees for the study were chosen through my prior knowledge of the venue as frequent visitor, bar-person and regular performer. Later interviewees were either suggested by earlier participants, or chosen to add to the number of people interviewed from various strata of engagement. Several participants contacted me or earlier interviewees, expressing a willingness to be included in the interview process. This network selection process in which specifically selected, recommended, plus self-selected participants is useful when the interviewees belong to no “naturally bonded, common groups” (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993: 73), as was the case in this study. Understanding that the quality and usefulness of some insider research can suffer from the enthusiasm of an inspired participant within the scene being studied (Bennett, 2002), interviewees were chosen from a defined set of four strata of engagement with the site. These were owners, bar-workers, musicians, and regular patrons. This added a degree of quota selection (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993: 72) to the participant selection process, intended to more fully cover the range of views available.
Criticism could be levelled at my not having applied other, more sociologically traditional group delimitations to my interviewee choices, such as gender, age, ethnic background or socio-economic descriptors. However, as with members of a musical group, interviewees are being defined by their engagement status in relation to the site, whether male or female, old or young. Thus each participant’s actions within a group (or the roles they played in or from that group) are seen as more important to the results of their collective actions than the anthropological positions they held personally as male/female, young/old, or how they viewed themselves as part of musical genre specific sub-groups. I agree with Mishler (1991) who suggests,

\[\text{(w)hen these responses are assembled in the different subgroups, by age, gender, and the like, the results are artificial aggregates that have no direct representation in the real world of communities, social institutions, families, or persons (pg 26).}\]

In musical groups the participant’s role within the group is more important than their social status; a good drummer is a good drummer, despite his or her age, gender, ethnicity or religiosity. This study seeks to focus intently on the site. With this in mind each interviewee’s engagement with the site has been given an important place in order to understanding the actions of participants within the site. The interviewees are not limited to musicians who played at the site despite the focus on music-making in the research objectives. I can find no other survey of a popular music-making venue that includes interviews with people from various levels of engagement with the place. This study is unique in that its focus is the place, and the actions of those who built the culture of music-making and appreciation that flourished there. Patrons, bar-staff and managers influenced the culture developed at the Sandringham, and their stories have been included so as to offer a more complete picture of the ways people built and supported, and identified with this culture.

A full list of participants can be seen in Table 1, including the date of the interview and the position the interviewee held in relation to the site, in my view, at the time. Longer descriptions of their positions within the site’s social structure and their relation to the researcher are included (at times) in the thesis. It must be noted that
their positions at the site in relation to the design of the study were not always correctly surmised. The design of the study meant that I could choose people from these four areas, but the data shows that the assumptions I made about their engagements were sometimes incorrect, and this become one of the important findings of the study overall.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee/s</th>
<th>Date of interview</th>
<th>Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Justin Lowe &amp; Suzie Bower</td>
<td>30/05/07</td>
<td>patron</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lachlan Dengate</td>
<td>05/06/07</td>
<td>musician</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phil Blatch &amp; Lisa Rowland</td>
<td>06/06/07</td>
<td>patron</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murray Rees</td>
<td>12/07/07</td>
<td>staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kirsty Lenthal</td>
<td>17/07/07 &amp; 23/07/07</td>
<td>staff/manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lena Minutillo</td>
<td>09/08/07</td>
<td>staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bernie Hayes &amp; Julia</td>
<td>16/08/07</td>
<td>musicians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richardson</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Craig New</td>
<td>11/09/07</td>
<td>patron</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nic Dalton</td>
<td>07/09/07</td>
<td>musician</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dave Aston</td>
<td>23/10/07</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Anonymous</td>
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<td>Peter Robinson</td>
<td>02/11/07</td>
<td>patron</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steph Miller</td>
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<td>musician</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suzie Schlesinger</td>
<td>28/02/08</td>
<td>staff/manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nadia Rangan</td>
<td>23/05/08</td>
<td>patron</td>
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<tr>
<td>John Encarnacao</td>
<td>27/05/08</td>
<td>musician</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tim Freedman</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warren Spooner</td>
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<td>Mark Hyland &amp; Harry Ree</td>
<td>28/08/08</td>
<td>patrons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris McBurnie</td>
<td>02/10/08</td>
<td>patron</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gen Maynard</td>
<td>02/10/08</td>
<td>musician</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 – Interviewees for the study and their initial engagement roles.
Each interviewee was approached by telephone and interviews were held at a place of their choosing, most often in their homes. I wanted the interviews to be more conversational than formal, looking for personal narratives of their recollections of the place. As Mishler (1991) discusses at length, collection and analysis of narrative forms is a relatively recent phenomena in social research, but he argues strongly for the efficacy of this conversational approach over more formal survey methods. Patton (1990: 283) suggests an ‘interview guide’, a series of questions asked to each participant, that offers a structure for the conversation but does not limit the interview to following lines of inquiry that may arise. This approach also offers a way of identifying common themes for analysis across many interviews, something that can be problematic in more informal interview designs.

**Interviews**

The interview ‘guide’ questions were formulated as conversational or open questions as these have been found to elicit “engaged personal narratives” (Foley & Valenzuela, 2008: 295). Mishler (1991: 96) surveys Marianne Paget’s writing on the use of less structured interview practice, finding that interviewees are inclined to offer ‘deeper’ answers when the interviewer asks questions appropriate to the context of the narrative being recorded. Scripted questions are useful when eliciting “desired data” (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993: 173), but at the beginning of this research I was not clear as to the specific data available. As stated earlier, my thoughts were to document the collective historical narrative. In order to elicit narratives wherein the qualities that produced such a flourishing music-making place could be identified and analysed, “open questions are preferable” (ibid: 174). A degree of improvisation, appropriate to the interview situation was therefore required. A list of suggested questions taken to each interview is included as Appendix A.

The questions were written with each participant’s role and strata of engagement at the site in mind. However, as the process continued, and as each participant described their experiences with the site more fully, the boundaries I had placed between these roles became less defined. As their stories unfolded and new roles emerged, so the questions from each section became relevant to interviewees I had
first thought of as solely a ‘patron’ or ‘musician’. There is a more detailed discussion of this research outcome and its potential meanings with regard to the sociological underpinnings of the culture of the site in the concluding chapter.

As I was known to the majority of participants, conducting a more formal survey with carefully scripted questions would seem out of the ordinary in the interview situation, and the ‘ordinary’ actions of the participants were what I was seeking. Our familiarity, and our shared experiences of the site offered a feeling of open exchange for the majority of the interviews conducted. Each interview was recorded, and I took notes as well. This note-taking, helpful to the researcher in “check(ing) our beginning assumptions, analysis, and conceptual frame” (Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner, & McCormack Steinmetz, 1991: 82) and important in keeping a critical distance from the narrative (O'Reilly, 2005: 99) became more important in keeping me focussed during the interview. There was a constant inclination to enjoy the personal interaction with friends, some I had not seen for several years, and to recline into reverie rather than concentrate on the joint development of the emerging narrative.

Although it is clear that “there are worlds of meaning that lie beyond words” (Frisch, 1998: 103) transcribing the digitally recorded interviews was essential to the identification of emergent themes. The interviews were transcribed either by me, or a paid transcription service, and reviewed for errors. I reviewed the recorded interview on many occasions during the analysis process, to validate or change transcribed language. The only consistent error, made by transcribers unfamiliar with the scene being studied, were band names, identification markers which are social currency in themselves (in this context) and important in identifying levels of engagement within the scene.

Questions, such as “When did you first play at the Sandringham Hotel?”, attempt to position the interviewee historically. When asked to several musicians, and coupled with the question “what were the playing conditions like?” an overview of the physical attributes of the venue was sought. “Can you recall any incidents during gigs that speak about the uniqueness of the venue?”, allows the interviewee to slip into reverie, and to question their experiences in light of their memories of other
venues. This helps position the Sandringham in its social context, in some ways defining the role it played in the music-making scene in Sydney at the time.

As the venue operated as a community meeting point for local artists, I wanted to hear stories of community interaction and engagement from interviewees. Questions such as “Did you visit the pub at times there weren’t bands on? Why?”, asked to people identified as patrons, and “Did you enjoy the colourful patrons/ Are there any you recall?” to the hotel owner, were included to elicit anecdotes of social interaction. “Did you meet and/or collaborate with people you met at the hotel?”, asked to musicians, was designed to highlight the artistic support the venue offered, as well as gleaning stories of musical collaborations. “Did the area/staff/patrons influence the entertainment you hired?”, asked of the two entertainment bookers interviewed, was also included to gain more insight into the level of community involvement prevalent at the site, and to find out to what extent this activity impacted on the overall ‘feel’ of the venue.

Some questions were directly relevant to issues identified by prior research as having serious effects on the production and maintenance of inner city rock music scenes. “Why live music rather than poker machines?”, asked of the hotel owner was included to gain first-hand knowledge of the choices made by venue managers in light of findings made by Johnson and Homan (2003) and Homan (2003a). Homan (2003b) also researched venues and their interactions with law and order in Sydney, and questions such as “Were there problems with this (offering live bands) regarding police or the local community?”, and off-the-cuff discussions of interactions between local police and bar-staff/managers were included to explore these issues.

Many of the questions came from my own knowledge of the site. I was deeply immersed in a scene Justin Hayes heard called “pretentious” (Blunt, 2001: 253), but that he experienced as the “most relaxed” (ibid) playing venue. Interview questions arose from my personal experiences, as did off-the-cuff discussions conducted in light of this shared first-hand knowledge. Identification with the community that met at the place, the ritual actions of the day-to-day operation of the venue, and the unique architectural space each had profound effects on my experience of the place and the guide questions would naturally reflect this. The interviews were designed to
elicit narratives of experiences of the same factors, through the memories of each interviewee’s actions at the place in various roles. They were conducted with a combination of “conversation approach with an interview guide approach” (Patton, 1990: 282) allowing “individual differences” (ibid) to emerge while imposing some limit on the range of topics discussed. This limiting, however minimal, assisted the coding process, concentrating narrative themes making co-emergent topics or shared experiences more likely, and this in turn assisted the analysis process.

Social scientists could be critical of the absence of specific economic or personal relationship questions and I could agree with any reasonably argued case. The critique could be countered with an understanding that “the flow of information depends on the (researcher’s) social role held within the group studied and the knowledge deemed appropriate for incumbents to possess” (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993: 334), with cognisance of the social/moral mores prevalent in the researcher himself. The personal relationships I shared with many of the interviewees precluded me asking questions about, or discussing knowledge I have, of the interviewees’ personal interactions involving money and sex, and this has limited the research and its potential outcomes. These topics are common in tabloid social commentary (and much else besides). However, I’m keen to avoid the “spectacular nature of subcultures” (Stahl, 2004: 53), phenomena that make interesting reading but obscure other, more nuanced and significant attributes present in the culture.

**Analysis**

The analysis of the data incorporates themes drawn from areas of academic investigation concerned with issues of place and space, community music making, identity, ritual identification and meaning, human geography and popular music production and performance. Added to this is the researcher’s personal experience of the site, at various levels of engagement, for over ten years. This site-specific experience is also set against the researcher’s long experience in and around other popular music venues in Sydney.
In terms set by Goetz and LeCompte (1981) the analysis for this study is ‘inductive’ rather than ‘deductive’, in that the data was collected with no prior theoretical viewpoint (personal/experiential viewpoint notwithstanding); ‘generative’ rather than ‘verificatory’, in that the analysed data attempts to construct its own hypothesis; ‘constructive’ rather than ‘enumerative’, in that coincident themes are drawn from each of the interviews and compared for similarities or differences; and ‘subjective’ rather than ‘objective’, in that the words of the interviewees are given preference and the analysis grows from their view of the place. This ‘inductive-generative-constructive-subjective’ (IGCS) designation sits at one end of a broad plane that was conceived to assess ethnographic researcher’s analysis protocols. Other analysts liken the IGCS approach to “naturalistic data processing” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) with the provisor that inductive processes construct generalised boundaries, errantly standardising unique expressions of human culture.

As the interview data was recorded, reviewed and transcribed, emergent themes formed codes that were recalled and applied to subsequent interview data. I took notes during interviews and common experiences were documented as they were spoken about in the interviews. Previous interviews were reviewed when new codes emerged from later interviews, although this rarely happened in the last ten interviews. The coalescing codes formed the basis of the identified three prevalent drivers of the music-making culture of the Sandringham, but I am keen to acknowledge here the inherent fallibility of an individually imposed universal theory of the cultural experience of the place. “Qualitative analysis is interpretive, idiosyncratic, and so context dependent as to be infinitely variable”, (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993: 330) it must be acknowledged.

I have included many long quotations from participants in the thesis for several reasons. Recent studies in social research have found that in the view of some research readers, interview quotations “added depth, richness and flavour which verbatim words could bring to a research report” (Corden & Sainsbury, 2006). Some readers felt quotations added intense feelings authors could not convey, but some saw the inclusion of quotations as exposing a lack of interpretive skill in the researcher. Many of the guiding texts for the Sandringham study include long quotations, particularly those concerned with music-making cultures (Blunt, 2001;
Fornas, Lindberg, & Sernhede, 1995; Gordon, 1995; Montano, 2007; Stafford, 2004), and these studies allowed the ‘voice’ of the research participants to sit alongside the ‘voice’ of the researcher, something I wanted for this study. Much as I was part of the culture of the Sandringham, I was a small part, and by including the directly spoken words of the interviewees a much broader view of the culture could emerge. The inclusion could also address the inherent imbalance of power Mishler (1991: 118) identifies in the research process. By including (arguably) unfiltered interview data, the power the researcher has in the research design, questioning and analysis is somewhat allayed, and research readers are offered free access to the data being analysed. The inclusion of long quotations is also in keeping with the ethos of the culture being researched, in that, as the thesis findings confirmed, the equanimity people displayed in the breakdown of the usually hierarchical roles played out at the site could be paralleled in giving people’s words about the site equal space with the analysis. This brings the thesis design in line with the unique attributes of the culture the thesis seeks to illuminate.

Because quotations from the interviewees reveal their, “depth of emotion, the ways they have organised their world, their thoughts about what is happening, their experiences, and their basic perceptions” (Patton, 1990: 24), longer quotations could be seen to reveal more of participants’ accounts of the world of the Sandringham. I acknowledge “there are limitations, however, to how much can be learned from what people say” (ibid :25). In Patton’s view the “complexities of many situations” (ibid) could best be understood through direct researcher participation, and as an insider at the time this study seeks to cover, my involvement with the site adds to the validity of the analysis. With more raw data being included, there can be more opportunities for triangulation between sources, and more chance my unquestioningly subjective analysis can be called into question.

**Triangulation**

It is important in ethnographies of this kind to validate the stories gathered through a process of triangulation (Ely et al., 1991: 96), as this “improves the probability that findings and interpretations will be found credible” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985: 305).
During the interview process, I asked several participants about specific events that others had recounted, thus confirming or questioning specific actions recounted. Also, several participants offered their recollections of specific events that either I had been present at, or other interviewees recalled as well, providing triangulating data. These multiple views of the events, as Steinmetz discusses (Ely et al., 1991: 96), seen from multiple levels of engagement via the differing roles interviewees inhabited at the place, elicit the converging and also inconsistent data that drive analysis, helping build a trustworthy account of the place at the time.

This triangulation of sources, “seldom lead(s) to a single, totally consistent picture” (Patton, 1990: 467) but the differences in account make findings believable and credible. Accessing a “multiplicity of data sources” (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993: 48) assists triangulation, and recordings, videotapes, pamphlets and photographs offered by the interviewees helped to confirm (or question) statements made during interviews. My own assumptions and recollections were also tested against interview statements and these collected artefacts. Calls for other modes of triangulation through the use of multiple investigators, various methods and differing theories (Lincoln & Guba, 1985: 305) could not be addressed due to several factors. As this thesis is being prepared for submission for a higher research degree, employing other researchers was impossible, both procedurally and financially. My own inexperience as a researcher, having come to this study from an honours degree in music, precluded me from implementing any confirming strategies, like pre-formulated surveys or recorded group conferences that could have elicited useful data. As the theories have grown from the data collected, using an “inductive research” (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993: 42) method, the application of alternate theories would take more time than I had available. The 25 interviewees, my own involvement and recollection, and the collected supporting materials provide clear evocation of the time and place enough.

My Role as Insider Researcher

“All research is interpretive” argue (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008: 31), and this is not least because the researcher is bound by preconceptions. As Shuker (1994) writes,
“(A)nalysys and documentation cannot be divorced from the volatile and contested area of emotions and popular memory” (pg 283), and I agree. Qualitative research is shaped by the researcher’s history but enlivened by the researcher’s experience. In order to clearly contextualise the analysis of the collected data in this study, it may be useful to outline here my connection with the Sandringham Hotel so as to ameliorate the subjective filter somewhat, and to offer the reader as honest a view of the research limitations as can be provided.

I walked into the Hotel sometime in 1986 as a recent arrival from Bjelke-Petersen-governed Queensland. The history of the Brisbane rock scene is well covered in Stafford’s *Pig City* (Stafford, 2004) and as a lead singer and saxophonist with The Kents, I had experienced the climate of subcultural Brisbane first hand. In the year prior, and the year after our move to Sydney, bands that made the same move included Vicious Kites, My Three Sons, Ups and Downs, The Skeletones, Peso Kim, The Spliffs and The Headstones. These bands followed a well-travelled pathway, previously negotiated by groups such as The Saints, The Coloured Balls, The Go Betweens, The Dum Dums (Tex Perkins’ band), John Kennedy’s Love Gone Wrong and others. The Kents played at many inner city and city fringe pub rock venues including the Sydney Cove Tavern and the Lismore Hotel in Sydney city, the Harold Park Hotel, Glebe, the Hopetoun Hotel, Surry Hills, the Royal Oak and the Vulcan Hotels in Chippendale, the Manzil Room and the Piccadilly Hotel, King’s Cross, and the Mosman Hotel, Mosman. I visited these hotels as a patron also, to enjoy the thriving band scene these venues supported. I cannot recall my first impressions of the Sandringham Hotel but as a once or twice performer and more regular patron for the years until around 1992, my thoughts about the pub were generally in line with the descriptions offered by many of the interviewees. It seemed to be the dirtiest, least cared for, inner city venue I had experienced but the ‘feel’ of the place was one of relaxed, if not intoxicated support for the bands. My focus at the time was the music and I had little regard for the more nuanced culture of the place that this study describes. The unique positioning of the stage and bar, one of the defining features of the venue and its legacy, impressed me as a performer but often annoyed me as a patron making visiting on popular nights fairly uncomfortable.
Around 1992 I moved into the area and began visiting the hotel on a more regular basis, also visiting during the day, when bands were not performing. My efficacy as an editor with Thomson Publications was curtailed by my new band’s playing schedule and, on moving from day work to night work, my sunlight hours were freer. The band I played in at the time, The Andy 500, comprised members who had a long association with the Sandringham, and we became regular performers there. We often filled the venue on Friday or Saturday nights, so along with my day visits I came to meet and socialise with many of the people interviewed for this project. In 1994, at my request, Kirsty Lenthal, the bar manager at the time (and an interviewee) offered me two or three (sometimes four) four-hour shifts per week as a barman, and these were usually night shifts.

Until 1996/7 I played music, served alcohol and socialised at the place, and this led to deep immersion in the culture of the venue. For several years I enjoyed the atmosphere of what I considered to be a socially progressive community that actively and enthusiastically supported music and other performing arts practitioners, while offering a safe and inclusive space to those who identified themselves with the alternative music scene in Sydney. I guested/played there with many bands including The Gadflys, Trout Fishing in Quebec, Front End Loader, McBobybag, The Thurston Howlers, Asteroid B-612, Shaggin’ Wagon and others. With Dave Aston from Trout Fishing in Quebec (an interviewee) and Bow Campbell from Front End Loader, I formed the Impossibles, a band that played regularly there for several years. Campbell and I were both bar staff and had met in that role. For one six-month period I shared a house in the adjoining suburb, Erskineville with three other staff members. Two of these, Suzie Schlesinger and Murray Rees where interviewed for this study.

From mid-1996 I began to question my use of alcohol and drugs, and through an intensive psycho-therapeutic process, my reliance on intoxicants steadily declined. So too did my attachment to the people and places that supported and (unwittingly) encouraged my use of those substances. Although I continued to play at the venue regularly, my bar job and my daily visits ended. My friendships with the people I met at the venue continue, but not to the close degree they did in the early-to-mid-1990s.
My analysis of the data collected for this study comes therefore with a close experience of the wider Sydney band scene coupled with a concentrated experience of deep immersion in the Sandringham scene. I experienced the site as a musician, staff member and patron, but moved to take distance from the place, coming to see the culture in a less enthusiastic light. There are two salient points to make about my position as a researcher in light of this personal history. Firstly, my insider position could be considered somewhat variable, contrary to a black-and-white insider/outsider designation, due to the changing nature of my involvement with the venue, and the time that has passed since the actions and events being considered. At times I was very inside, and at others not so. The personal relationships formed and engaged in at the site have passed, and I rarely see the friends I had then. This changeable insider role may be my perception only, and readers may view my status as purely insider considering the methodological approach applied. Secondly, a prolonged psycho-therapeutic process instils an intense degree of self-reflexivity and this manifests in an external view that offers the researcher the detached eye and ear necessary for, if not completely objective analysis, the open minded view that offers keen insights.

**Ethics**

Potential interviewees were approached firstly by telephone. A time and place convenient to the interviewee was agreed, and at the interview each participant was asked to read the Information Sheet (Appendix B) and to read, sign and date the Consent Form (Appendix C). These processes, and the list of guide questions were assessed by the University of Western Sydney’s Human Research Ethics Committee and given the approval number HREC 07/074. People have been named, but were offered anonymity. One person chose this option and I have removed references to other people in his/her interview so as to lessen any possible identification. Five people I approached either refused interview explicitly or implicitly by non-return of phone messages.
Literature Review

Music and Place: Ways of Looking

This study seeks, in part, to document a time in the history of music-making at a particular place at a particular time. As it takes a broad view the literature covered includes writings on the Australian popular music scene, which are drawn from anthropological, cultural studies, sociological, ethnographic and musicological writings. The geography of music provides key principles in the identification and documentation of localised manifestations of music practice and realisation. For Carney (1998), Peter Hugh Nash’s (1968) work initiated a new area of study, seemingly untouched by ethnographers, folklorists, ethnomusicologists or anthropologists. He posits the term ‘music geography’, identifying nine phenomena that encompass the area of such research. These are styles, structures, lyrics, performers and composers (seemingly held as equal in importance), centres and events, media, ethnic, instrumentation, and industry. Over half of the studies Carney surveys concern American country music, while only around 20% look at rock music “and its myriad spin-offs” (Carney, 1998: 3). The remainder explore areas described as classical, folk, gospel, jazz, blues, ethnic, and popular.

Carney identifies a “multiplicity” of themes and divides the scholarly works he has listed into ten general “taxonomies” (1998: 3). Recent writings about Australian popular music could be placed into these taxonomies. The references after the headings refer to the some Australian research within that field. Carney’s taxonomies can be paraphrased as:

1) *The delimitation of music regions and interpretation of regional music.* (Carroll & Connell, 2000; Encarnacao, 2008b)
2) *The evolution of style with place.* (Connell & Gibson, 2003; Walker, 2000)
3) *The origin and diffusion of music phenomena.* (Blunt, 2001)
4) *The spatial dimensions of music dealing with human migration, transport routes, and communication networks.* (Stafford, 2004; Stratton, 2004)
5) The psychological and symbolic elements of music pertinent to shaping the
classification of a place-image or sense of place and place consciousness.
(Duffy, 2000; Encarnacao, 2008a)

6) The effect of music on the cultural landscape. (Poole, 2002)

7) The spatial organization of the music industry. (Breen, 1999; Mathieson,
   2000)

8) The relationship of music to the natural environment.

9) The function of “nationalistic” and “anti-nationalistic” music.

10) The interrelationships of music with other cultural traits in a special sense.
    (Homan, 2003a, 2003b) (Carney, 1998: 3-4)

These few references do not provide a comprehensive list of Australian popular
music scholarship, and one could argue the pertinence of the suggested study to the
theme I have attached it to. It does show that scholarship outside geography
departments considers place as an important factor in understanding Australian
popular music making.

Carney describes the wide range of approaches to music geography as being
problematic and providing a target for criticism, but also supports Marvin Mikesell’s
(1978) view that its “lack of consensus” (Carney, 1998: 4) marks the field, and
makes it attractive. He also sees attraction in the depth of the field. Carney calls for
research into the changes in music industry relations brought about by technological
innovation and interactivity.

Ample data exists on the geography of music events, clubs and organizations, but
little writing has married this data to the music and the people of these places. This
area, described by Carney’s second theme, is covered in the Sandringham study
although the project reaches further than this. The Sandringham study walks what
Carney describes as this ‘new path’ through an urban music-making site. There is
much data to sift, and room for other evaluations of the data I have collected. I am
encouraged by his enthusiasm for research on music that is connected to a specific
site, a music of a place, although my study brings the boundaries of the site down to
a small, unassuming bar on a busy road in an economically poor (at the time) part of
Sydney’s inner-western suburbs.
Gibson, Costello and Hughes (2004) cover the salient arguments being contested in the field of human geography. They outline criticisms of de-politicisation and a bent for story-telling rather than narrative analysis, in a firm call for action against ‘dumbing down’ academic theorising. These criticisms are not confined to the field of human geography, they claim, but are evident wherever issues of ‘culture’ are discussed.

As academic writing becomes more targeted at publication and conference acceptance, as the line between academic pursuit and economic imperative becomes more opaque, it is natural for ‘fashion’ theories to emerge, they argue. The investigation of the cutting edge of any field’s agreed boundaries could be seen to constitute a ‘fashion’, but as a means of creating ‘new’ knowledge, trends in academic writing coalesce and this is a consequence of the role research plays in cultural production. Another argument they address is the call for researchers to move from representative documentation, looking to movies, magazines and other media for data, to more face-to-face fieldwork and analysis. Criticism based on secondary documents fails to acknowledge the un-stated and often ignored position of the ‘objective’ analyst in relation to her/his subject, the authors write (Costello et al., 2004).

This discussion is interesting in light of my want for the Sandringham study to be acceptable (and useful) to the broad range of academic fields it covers. Several historians have suggested (in private) that as the subject is only “ten or so” years ago, the value of the study as history is negligible. It does provide a history of sorts, however, as seen through the eyes of the participants, and as time passes the value of cultural documentation collected closer to the time events took place increases. Gibson, Costello and Hughes call for “a healthy level of self-reflexivity” (2004: 125), and this is another reminder for my ‘insider’ enthusiasm to remain as objective as self-awareness will allow. It is interesting to hear this call from human geographers, as cultural theorists interested in popular music also lament the loss of objectivity in insider research (Bennett, 2002). The authors acknowledge the value in broad approaches to fieldwork and representative data analysis and outline the papers included in the special issue their essay forms the introduction to. Of special interest
is the number of ‘insider’ researchers looking to shine new light on people less represented in mainstream media. Textile industry outworkers, sex workers and Thai beach workers are each the focus of papers, and in similar ways I could place the musicians and patrons of the Sandringham as equally (if equality could be judged) ignored in current mainstream representations of music-makers.

The notion of ‘place’ in relation to music generation as discussed in cultural theory is many faceted. George Lipsitz (1994) deepens his discussion on popular music and place by positioning the narrative within philosophical discourse, using cross-cultural collaborations or ‘borrowings’ to highlight an exploitation/exultation dichotomy. By looking at the controversy surrounding Paul Simon’s ‘Graceland’ album, he exposes the position of the borrowing musician as ‘colonial baron’, using ethnomusicological ‘discoveries’ of ‘new’ musics (new to the western listener anyway) for personal gain. The processes involved in realising Simons’ music are critically analysed and indigenous participants are interviewed to build a narrative that questions the intentions of the western musician who goes exploring in ethnomusicological areas. Lipsitz asks us to question the validity of the term ‘songwriter’ in light of the breadth of experience the indigenous musicians brought to the project. Lipsitz’s critical eye exposes a seemingly background issue with my project, although as my analysis proceeded the background has come seeping through, colouring the decisions that inevitably mould the thesis from the raw data available. Throughout the Sandringham project, it could be argued that the uncovering of stories, the bringing to light events surrounded in Sydney music scene nostalgia, may enhance my personal standing within a community that includes recognised media ‘personalities’. How do I place participations in an equanimous way, not preferencing one interviewee’s contribution over another? Will my personal prerogatives pervade the study? Lipsitz offers advice to those entering other territories, cautioning that only “by listening to anyone who will talk and by talking to anyone who will listen” (1994 pgvii), can we hope to undercut our personal experiences to some degree. This is an important sub-narrative in the Sandringham study.

Throughout the analysis process I attempted to be as non-judgmental and open to interviewee suggestions as time and space allowed. Although I chose interview subjects who I knew could offer insights into particular issues relevant to music
production at the site, I also took suggestions for new interviewees from these initial subjects. Following Lipsitz’s suggestion, I wanted the path to the realisation of this project to be built by all who participated, despite time and length limitations of a thesis focussed research project. Perhaps this study is only the first few sentences of a much longer and deeper conversation, not limited to the Sandringham (although there will undoubtedly be more to say, and more people ready to say it), but expanded to include the interplay between music and communities across Australia.

Taking an ethnographic view of music-making places has become more popular in recent years. Ruth Finnegan’s (1989) and Sara Cohen’s (1991) work in popular music studies has been highly influential. By taking an ethnographic approach to issues of ‘community’ and ‘identity’ in the study of local music-making scenes, they have brought new perspectives to the research possibilities in ethnomusicology, anthropology, and cultural studies. Power relationships need to be acknowledged and addressed in any ethnographic study, Cohen argues, highlighting the view that a researcher brings her/himself to the study, and a purely objective position is impossible to maintain. Anthropologists are looking closer to home more often now and the notion of ‘otherness’ fore-grounded in traditional ethnographic research is becoming harder to define. “Strangeness, familiarity and otherness are shifting categories” (Cohen, 1993: 125), and in comparisons between African musical performances and English musical performances these traits can be mapped and discussed. Researchers from the once bounded fields of cultural theory and anthropology are more commonly sharing ethnographic methodologies, and issues relating to each field can be helpful in driving more useful outcomes, she argues. Seeing the ‘whole’ through concentrated studies on specific parts may be problematic, and including long discussions about seemingly trivial occurrences could seem banal. Cohen surveys recent (at the time) work done (and being done) on popular music, noting the traditional use of music industry statistics can be problematic. The ideology propagated by radio stations, magazines and other media sources leads researchers to concentrate on ‘successful’ music-making, focused on known forms and known musicians. The majority of music-making happens away from such institutions, and this is where Cohen encourages researchers to look. She laments the paucity of research into how musicians make their musical and social choices, and these are two areas (although weighted towards the social) the
Sandringham study seeks to investigate. Cohen refers to the Finnegan book (1989) and the way she surveys “musical practices and processes rather than structures, texts or products” (Cohen, 1993: 127), finding how music-making plays an important part in the lives of the English town of Milton Keynes’ amateur (and semi-professional) musicians. Finnegan’s approach, then seen as novel, showed how music was not subject to previously held assumptions based on the race, class, age or academic standing of those involved. Finnegan’s book has had a strong effect on the design and implementation of the Sandringham study. By treating all the expressions of musical practice documented in the town as equal, she undercuts the predominant thoughts about music-making have ‘high’ and ‘low’ forms. This is done, as Cohen suggests, in several ways. One important methodological choice was asking the same questions of each of the ‘pathways’ to music-making surveyed. Finnegan’s choice of the term ‘pathway’ to describe each of the manifestations of music-making is significant also, eschewing other well used descriptors like ‘community’, ‘network’ or ‘scene’. Each pathway is kept open and operational by the hard work of interested individuals, much like the Sandringham was kept running by the commitment of those who identified with the place. The ‘worlds’ (as Finnegan describes them) of rock, classical, folk etc. are not separated from each other, she found, but share overlapping pathways that weave in and out of lives and places. By taking this approach, Finnegan shifts the focus of research from the product to the producer and to the effects the processes of music-making have on the people involved in them. Her work influenced Cohen’s research into the Liverpool music-making scene (Cohen, 1994) and both works have influenced the Sandringham study.

(But) as a researcher I consider the only valid approach is not to air my own ethnocentric evaluations as if they had universal validity but to treat the many different forms of music as equally worthy of study on their own terms (Finnegan, 1989: 7).

The implicit acknowledgement of the influence of an evaluating ‘self’, formed and functioning from life experience, on the choice of interest area is further impetus to conduct the Sandringham study in as open a way as possible. Having been personally involved in some of the events described in my study, I felt the best way to allow a more honest view of the actions being studied to emerge was for the inclusion of
unedited interview narratives. Neither Finnegan nor Cohen use direct quotations from interview subjects and this may be due to their not being so directly involved with the people being researched. Finnegan says academic accounts can “never totally avoid giving a faceless and reducing impression” (pg 11) of what is an immersive experience for the participants, and documenting their words, as recorded in conversations about their memories of the time and place, gives relief to an otherwise flat reporting. Finnegan’s place is a whole town of music-making while Cohen (1991) looks at two bands operating in a particular city. The Sandringham study looks at one venue and includes narratives offered by people interested and immersed in the music-making culture of the place but who are not musicians.

Lipsitz’s ‘place as origin’ view can be compared to a ‘place as geographic marker’ view seen in Blake Gumprecht’s Lubbock on Everything: The Evocation of Place in Popular Music (A West Texas Example) (1998). This essay looks at the influence place can have on a song. It also looks at the ability of some songs to invoke certain places. The author laments the paucity of work in this field, even within the relatively recent field of music geography. He makes distinction between this essay and music geographer’s work that focuses “on the origins, diffusion, and distribution of musical styles, performers, and related elements--subjects that are largely quantifiable or mapable” (pg 61). Are we seeing here a new field’s efforts to establish its credentials in academic discourse by weighting its fields of inquiry in favour of quantitative research, over more amorphous qualitative approaches? Gumprecht argues that further to direct linkages made by artists to places, mentioning Bruce Springsteen and The Beach Boys among others, artists can invoke a sense of a place without directly singing of them. As an example the author discusses Lightning Hopkins and the sense of ‘Houston ghetto’ the artist’s ‘lazy, acoustic blues’ carries, even though the artist never mentions the place in his lyrics.

The author also argues that by not receiving mainstream acceptance, with no pressure to universalize their music, artists are free to more fully voice their local geographical surrounds. The parallels with the plethora of non-mainstream music that flourished at the Sandringham Hotel are clear, but being an urban venue the impact of the natural geographical aspects so clearly enunciated in the Lubbock musician’s work is less obvious in music looked at in my study. Mention is made of
New York’s Velvet Underground, New Orleans’ The Meters and Phoenix’s Meat Puppets. He sets three non-mainstream artists in relation to their place, that being Lubbock, Texas. The three artists are Joe Ely, Butch Hancock, and Terry Allen, all born in the town but no longer resident there. This study begins with an evocative description of the geography around Lubbock, essential if we are to discuss any notion of ‘sounding’ a space. In a similar way, interviewees descriptions of Newtown in the 1980s and 1990s helps us ‘read’ the music produced from Sandringham bands and artists. Being plains land and lacking water, Gumprecht explains the dominance of the sky over landscape, and also the predominance of an interminable wind as central to an understanding of the place. With respect to the social landscape the author quotes Butch Hancock’s humorous recollection of the beliefs held by Lubbock residents. “In Lubbock, we grew up with two main things”, Hancock says. "God loves you and he's gonna send you to hell, and that sex is bad and dirty and nasty and awful and you should save it for the one you love. I really felt as though I had landed on the wrong planet” (pg 61).

Gumprecht then moves to a detailed look at the music career of Joe Ely, his early musical experiences, his first bands and releases, and highlights the artist’s enduring fondness for country, as opposed to city, life. The song-writer finds his ability to compose stymied by urban environments, needing to be in wide-open spaces to write good songs. By reproducing words of several Ely songs, the author identifies direct links between lyrics and specific geographical markers and posits that these links build a solid sense of the West Texas landscape. Of particular interest to the author is the appearance of the wind that blows around and through the characters in many of Ely’s songs. Songs written by Sandringham artists carry the place in a similar way. Markers are subtle, but evident, and are documented and analysed in my study.

As with Lightning Hopkins’ evocation of place without direct naming, Gumprecht details aspects of Ely’s 1978 album Honky Tonk Masquerade that ‘sound’ the place, stating that “(i)t just sounds like West Texas” (pg 70). He concedes that this is hard to argue without taking the reader to the place, but identifies characteristics in the sounds on the record that carry a sense of the space around Lubbock; the “lonesome wail” of the steel guitar, the “thunderous ending” to a song about trains and the accordion that “helps capture some of the feeling of the Mexican street life in Lubbock” (1998: 70), at the time of Ely’s youth. I look for signs of urban Newtown
in the sound of songs by Crow, Magic Lunchbox and Front End Loader’s Bow Campbell, finding cultural and ritual markers along with urban landscape identifiers.

Moving then to Butch Hancock, the author explains Hancock’s ‘fame’, and the way his non-mainstream music has seeped through boundaries to appear on albums by Emmylou Harris and via the support act role Hancock has played on tours with the Cowboy Junkies. Hancock’s architecture education is described, and his engagement with the West Texas landscape is explored with mention of his employment, living spaces and art projects. When discussing Hancock’s album *West Texas Waltzes and Dust Blown Tractor Blues*, Gumprecht says “The album is so saturated with a sense of the place, in fact, that it could be used instead of a textbook for a college course on the geography of the Llano Estacado” (pg 73), the area that encompasses Lubbock.

Terry Allen is the third of the musicians discussed here, and Gumprecht outlines his visual art (as well as his music) in view of the prevalent Lubbock influence. Allen’s concept album of 1978, *Lubbock (On Everything)*, recorded when the artist returned to the city after many years away, is argued to embody the West Texas landscape via the narratives of the songs. Allen is positioned as more a “storyteller and wise ass” (pg 76) than a poet, and the characters in the songs display his take on the artists particular social interactions that to him, typify the Lubbock society.

Throughout the discussion, preference seems to be given to lyrical values rather than musical soundings. There are brief mentions of the sounds of trains or tractors, but these machines are not Lubbock specific. Reference to the wind, the flat landscape, the people and the place names seem to be where this study places the essence of the place sounding being elucidated by these artists. There is room and reason to look for chord progressions that mirror the landscape, or musical sounds or arrangement textures that sit as exposed as the oil pumps out on the plain. A more musicological approach, coupled with this ethnographic view could deepen our understanding of the evocative nature of these artist’s songs. “The unique characteristics of particular places leave their mark on all of us” (pg 76), writes Gumprecht, but which places, one might ask, especially in a world where people are so mobile? These three musicians, as outlined in the article, have seen many parts of the world. Perhaps it is the quality of its ‘unique characteristics’ that sets West Texas apart, a place unlike
others, striking in its flatness. What becomes interesting then is the notion that Lubbock’s lack of detail, its minimal stimuli has become for these artists, a deep well from which to draw. Or is it the flatland’s strangeness, its inherent difference from anything or anywhere else that embeds it so firmly in the minds of the songwriters? The Sandringham study discusses artist and their songs, but also looks to find what about the place made it unique, other than its geographic position. What marks did the unique architecture and the unique rituals of the Sandringham leave on the participants in this study?

**Local Music and its Place**

As well as documenting a history of the Sandringham Hotel, large parts of the data gathered for this study provide a close view of the socio-political and cultural contexts that prevailed at the time of the study. As a guide to approaching this data and its possible meanings, Shane Homan’s *The Mayor’s a Square* (2003b) is an important study for anyone looking at music and place within Australian contexts, but is particularly relevant because it approaches two cogent points in relation to my project. The first is the writing of a history of popular music making; the ‘who did what, when’ of particular scenes in Sydney’s music-making history. Homan outlines events in a timeline narrative, offering views gleaned from interviews recently conducted, and newspaper articles from the past. Several interviewees’ viewpoints are juxtaposed, offering a clearer look at conflicts between opposing youth sub-cultures, and between youth culture and authority figures. The overarching narrative is framed in terms of legal boundaries, their crossings and convergences.

In relation to the Sandringham study, Homan’s study highlights the importance of understanding a wider view of the everyday events that took place at the site. Although my engagement with the site being studied was heavy during one period of time, it is important that I adopt a view that does not preference this time over other periods. The potential for bias has been lessened through the inclusion of a broad range of interviewees, and also through the inclusion of other materials that provide documentation of the music-making at the site at various times. Homan’s frame of reference, the legal and political policy frameworks that impact on the development
and sustainability of places that support youth culture in Sydney, has had a significant effect on the way I view the development of the Sandringham Hotel as a music venue. Interviewees, in particular bar-staff and managers, had long-running and significant interactions with police from the Newtown area, and the strategies for dealing with changing legal requirements, liquor licensing laws, fire regulations and noise pollution laws, form an important part of the emerging narrative. In other work Homan (2003a) documents the connection between the ideas of noise (and therefore noise ‘pollution’) and community music-making and this makes explicit the previously unquestioned de-valuation of popular music in our society. This connection is made very clearly, and along with issues around gambling, drinking and cultural industry policies and ideologies, Homan identifies the various pressures brought to play in the instigation, regulation, or discontinuation of live music venues in inner-city Sydney. The Sandringham study touches on each of these subjects, but does it through first-hand interviews with people from one specific site, rather than across the city. The narratives that emerge bring a better understanding of the play of these pressures on individuals, and therefore on the community of live music players and listeners. Homan’s use of data collected through interviewing relevant stakeholders encourages me in the Sandringham study, although I rely on this data more than he does, looking for a more focussed and personal account of the music-making culture.

The second significant point raised in Homan’s (2003b) study relates to his mapping of ‘scene’ onto ‘site’, particularly in the fourth and fifth chapters. Here the author identifies subcultures and their markers, and positions the venues these subcultures thrived in within stories of the social interactions, bands, musical styles and media coverage of events he discusses. There are useful pathways laid here in relation to my aim of positioning the Sandringham within its (and the general music/social) community. By cross-referencing the events that interviewees discuss, and identifying supporting documentation in photographs, video footage, etc., a bigger view emerges facilitating an understanding of the broader context(s) the music-making at the Sandringham flowed amongst.

In relation to the de-valuation, or under-valuation of popular music-making in the Australian arts community, Bruce Johnson’s *Creative Nation, Creating Nation:*
issues in cultural policy and popular music (1995) assesses the governmental funding options for the type of music and music venue the Sandringham was. Johnson takes issue with the Australia Council Act 1975, specifically in relation to how its charter prescribes Australian arts practice, and ascribes value to certain practices and practitioners over others. He finds ‘tension’ in the document as it seeks to describe the Council’s role as supportive of everyday arts making, but states that this is best achieved through support of the most talented individual artists. These artists are seen as sitting outside community, Johnson states, and this sits at odds with the Council’s agenda. The artists were seen to exist very much inside the community the Sandringham and as stated elsewhere in this thesis, formed a large part of the people involved. Looking deeper at the unspoken and underlying ideology from which the document in question emerges, Johnson laments the perception that arts wisdom flows out from the board and its self-elected peers to the Australian public. Grant applicants are reviewed by ‘specialists’, and the closer the interests of the specialist and applying artist are, the more likely the application is to receiving funding. There is no provision for community advice to be sought or even acknowledged. He mentions the controversial case of the Chair of the Music Committee receiving large grants and points to the closed, circular nature of the peer approval system.

In a pointed polemic squarely aimed at the Council’s aim of supporting ‘diversity’, Johnson reflects on the ethnicity of those who sit on the committees charged with such a task. Representation by people of non-English background is meagre, he finds, and more meagre the higher the corporate position within the Council. ‘Difference’ he therefore supposes must mean different from the council, and the problems involved with the Council’s stated aims, and its ability to even recognise the complexities of its authoritarian position become clear. The Council ascribes value in terms of its Euro-centric traditions, preferring artist’s inclusion in galleries and festivals over more broad value judgements arising from the communities the Council sought to support.

‘Excellence’ is a Council constructed notion, Johnson argues, and we only hear ‘Council’ music attracting funds, not music with regional variation. ‘International standards’ are the measure of ultimate achievement in the Council’s report, but
where does this leave localised examples of vibrant music-making, like those witnessed at the Sandringham Hotel? How can the ‘value’ of such music be acknowledged, identified and ultimately supported by a Council that references only its own narrow view of ‘success’, and by peer practitioners it alone anoints. Johnson’s paper, delivered at a time when the Sandringham’s nightly music circus was in full swing, identifies how this prolific and pervasive node of community music activity could not have created a ripple of interest on the boards of the Australia Council, the body responsibly for the support and promotion of community arts in Australia. Skewed, as the Council’s ideology was in Johnson’s view, towards self-referential value judgements based on unwritten notions of ‘excellence’ and ‘achievement’, the music made at the Sandringham Hotel held little value in the eyes of those whose funding decisions could have seen the site continue in its function as an important community arts engagement place. The Sandringham has remained unacknowledged as an important site for in-depth study, except by a few academics, until now.

**Participant Voices**

Writing recent histories, and particularly histories that have local meaning, can become more evocative when the voices of the participants are heard. Andrew Stafford’s book, *Pig City: from the Saints to Savage Garden* (2004) covers the period from 1971 to 2000 in the Brisbane rock music scene. The book tells a story of popular music making in Brisbane, and positions this music making within the socio-political context at the time dominated by the Bjelke-Petersen Country Party government. As Stafford and many of his interviewees point out, the government in Queensland, with the collusion of a widely corrupted police force, actively suppressed youth activities, including independently organised music venues. This unwritten and unendorsed policy of social manipulation had a profound effect on the music produced at the time, he finds, and a vivid story of social connection and political resistance emerges.

Stafford builds his narrative from interviewing predominantly band members, but also radio announcers, venue owners and bookers. This inclusion of active
participants in a scene makes the events clearer, and the Sandringham study follows this approach.

The book covers the period of time when I was involved in the popular music scene in Brisbane, playing 4ZZZ venues and events, and also at larger ‘beer barn’ venues. With this personal experience in mind, it was interesting to see how the study documents events unfolding from various points-of-view, showing how seemingly simple actions can contain layers of narrative. Having been at some of the events described in the book, and also having had personal friendships with some of those interviewed, I was also interested to find I disagreed with some versions of events. This highlights the changeable nature of memory, and also brings an awareness of how complex factors at play in the lives of the protagonists at the time can colour interview narratives offered as part of a study conducted later. Stafford covers the events described with a mixture of interview and researched material, and mostly lets the stories tell themselves from the collected data, offering little colouring narration. This approach allows the sense of place to emerge unaided. In my study, the interviews and research data are supported by personal recollection, however changeable, offering a ‘close’ experience of the history covered.

There are few good histories of Australian underground rock music available, and there are many approaches available to the history writer. Bob Blunt (2001) provides a broad historical view with an approach that mirrors, in some way, the scene he documents. In Blunt: a biased history of Australian rock, Blunt expands his long practice of publishing within the inner Sydney (and to a lesser degree, inner-Melbourne) rock music scene. His independently produced fanzine ‘Blunt’, covered much the same material and in the same ad-hoc graphic way, almost invoking the ‘feel’ of underground rock production. Interviews and reflective pieces are set amongst black-and-white photographs predominantly of live rock performances, or set against band photos taken for print media (street press) use. Any theoretical approach or discussion is avoided and the narrative is resplendent in its preference for wilder, “rock life” types of stories, involving violent incidents or drug and alcohol consumption. The voyeur urge is indulged overtly in this approach, and a more disciplined line could have teased some more interesting and useful information from the plethora of rock protagonists interviewed.
The Sandringham receives many mentions in the book, including a dedicated three-page interview with the Hayes brothers (including Bernie Hayes, an interviewee for this study) who all played there regularly, and on occasions lived at the hotel. This is the only concentrated look at the hotel to be published prior to this thesis. Again Blunt allows the interviewees to openly tell their stories, a good approach that I like and employ. Blunt’s personal narrative colours the events to some extent. His enthusiastic and prolific engagement with rock music making in Sydney brings a unique and informative view, but the narrative seems to repeatedly let the reader know he was there, and some value judgements, particularly concerning the booking of bands at the Sandringham (pg 253). I struggle with this ‘informed participant/egocentric historian’ role. The subtitle to his book is well chosen. This has encouraged me to take a little more distance with the Sandringham project, relying more on interviewee narratives (as Blunt often does), in the hope of allowing the interviewees equal place.

Jon Stratton’s essay ‘Pub Rock and the Ballad Tradition in Australian Popular Music’ (2004) offers a view of hotel based popular music-making placed in a historical narrative, looking for precursors in European traditions. Stratton begins by setting the ‘pub rock’ phenomena as uniquely Australian, and positioning it at the core of Australian hard rock music. He positions the audience at these pub rock venues as working class in attitude and cultural outlook, and equates this with the high rates of working class migration to Australia in the mid-twentieth century. The ballad traditions of English and Irish immigrants were brought to Australia and became fundamental to pub rock bands, even though these traditions had died out in England. Stratton points to Cold Chisel’s reliance on ballad forms as one reason they failed to gain success in American and English markets, marking the ‘pub rock’ scene as meaningful only in Australia. A more common and accepted mainstream narrative discusses Australian rock as an outlying expression of trends in music coming from America and England. Stratton disputes this and begins by explaining the popularity of the ballad, particularly murder ballads, in England at the time Australia was being colonized by convicts and free-settlers. He cites AC/DC’s *Jailbreak* and many of Nick Cave’s works as examples of modern examples that grew from this tradition. The ballad in English and later early Australian tradition
was a song form used to horrify and entertain, but also as a form laden with political dissent. As an anti-establishment medium it found fertile ground in a land peopled by the ex-convict Irish, ruled by middle and upper class Englishmen. He argues that the popularity of music halls in early nineteenth century was transferred to the pub rock culture a century later, particularly due to the second great wave of Irish immigration after World War II.

My interest here is in the way Stratton seats pub rock firmly in a teleological narrative, and his essay provides a good survey of typical ballad based rock material against which I can assess songs that have come from Sandringham bands covered in the study. Although my study concentrates more on oral history and does not follow a teleological narrative, many songs are mentioned and briefly analysed. Stratton’s is one rare study that offers a clear historical precedent for song forms made popular in Australian rock music.

In looking at a particular place at a particular time, writings about music from particular Australian cities have been important. John Encarnacao is a music academic and one of the interviewees for the Sandringham study. His journal article ‘Melbournes by the Dozen: Four rock albums and the evocation of place’ (2008b) opens by positioning two popular views of how music operates in the minds and lives of listeners as they contemplate particular places through the lens offered by popular music. Grossberg’s (1987) view, that places remain largely in the minds of individual listeners, is discussed beside Lipsitz’s (1994) more socio-political view, that power relationships and contestations of access to economic means are played out in popular music making. Encarnacao sits his chapter as more in line with Grossberg’s view, although breaks with this view that uses the discussion of music-making to build social histories. His writing is about how he ‘sees’ the four albums discussed, and he makes clear justification for this ‘autoethnographic’, as he calls it, approach. Encarnacao shows how academic research has uncovered a plethora of perspectives and perceptions within specific scenes, and he acknowledges work done by Bennett (2004), Faris (2004) and Cohen (1994) that confirms this view. Interestingly, particularly with regard to my study, each find expressions of a connection with ‘community’ and formations of ‘identity’ important to those who make and listen to music in their respective places of investigation. The article looks
to these notions as it unpacks the sounds of Encarnacao’s chosen four albums, and how these albums form diverse interpretations of a music-making place across the four decades the albums come from.

The sound on the albums is important here, Encarnacao writes. Little academic work on popular music engages directly with the music, the lyric content, the arrangement, the style and timbre. Encarnacao treats the CD as the part of the data, adding recollections of his personal feelings as he first listened to this music from another place. Thus, as with the Sandringham study, he gives weight to the idea that personal engagement, and the memories of personal engagement, with the subject is worthy of study. This can shine some light on how music-making operates first in the minds of those influenced by it, before moving to better understand the macro effects it has on communities. It is also the ‘other-placeness’ that the chapter looks to uncover. How do we build ideas of other places (in this case Melbourne, in the mind of a Sydney musician) through our engagement with music from that place? With my study, the Sandringham Hotel of the study sits far from the Sandringham Hotel that operates today. If the past can be viewed as another place, history is about ‘other-placeness’, and by looking for that place in the recollections of the interviewees for this study, I hope a clear and multi-faceted gem will refract the light from a source hidden in history. Similar to my findings in the microcosm of the Sandringham Hotel, Encarnacao does not argue for a specific ‘sound’ of Melbourne. He does, as I do with my study, identify some ‘markers’, or recurring ideas that permeate the music he chooses, but points out that these markers are not exclusive to Melbourne music-making, only more clearly identified with the place.

Ray Hudson (2006) writes about the music community research that is coming from researchers based in geography departments. Hudson first acknowledges the ability of music to offer strong evocation of place. In classical and also popular traditions, he points to contemporary and historical instances of music inspired by specific places. His asks why human geographers have ignored music for so long, citing the rare instances of academic investigations from geography departments into music-making prior to 2000. This is a trend now changing, Hudson argues. Making reference to Bennett’s work (2004) he identifies four areas of interest driving human geographers to investigate music with closer attention. A new focus on ‘culture’,
growing interest in human practices, a move from sight as the dominant sense, and greater understanding of the role of emotional elements in human behaviour have all seen a sharp increase in music scholarship emerging from geography departments. Hudson says it is important to understand the political economy of music making, music being a site of commercial commodity production.

Hudson acknowledges Cohen’s (1991) study of music making in Liverpool, and her finding rituals associated with rock music production as being important to the people involved, and to the understanding of place in that context. I will look at Cohen’s studies in another review but agree with Hudson here, finding these rituals strong markers in the place-making that typified the culture of the Sandringham Hotel.

The essay continues to cover the salient issues of music and place, identifying scholarly works that highlight issues of socio-political importance, but none focus on one building, one small place, as the Sandringham study does. Many of the works cited are Australian in origin, including works by Connell and Gibson (2003), Dunbar-Hall (2003) and Johnson and Homan’s Vanishing Acts (2003) report. Hudson points to recent work (Hays & Minichiello, 2005) in Australia that finds, “(M)usic provides people with ways of understanding and developing their self-identity, of connecting with other people, of maintaining well-being and experiencing and expressing spirituality” (Hudson, 2006:630). Although Hays’ and Minichiello’s study was limited to elderly nursing home based subjects, my study finds similar benefits for the participants through their day-to-day involvement with the hotel. What this says about the role of the hotel in Australian cultural production, and the seemingly similar role played by nursing homes is something best left to others. Hudson discusses instances of local council policy involvement specifically aimed at supporting live music places. He discusses Gibson and Homan’s (2004) essay (reviewed below) that looks at the council policies that influenced the Sandringham Hotel, and proceeds to describe UK based examples of governmental policy support for music-making sites. He identifies key areas where these policies fail to make abandoned industrial buildings take root as places for music-making activities. Hudson finds that using music based urban redevelopment projects to drive economic redevelopment in places experiencing post-industrial depression is
highly problematic, and that economic imperative is far from the optimum criterion to gauge the success of such government funded projects.

Chris Gibson and Shane Homan’s journal article ‘Urban Redevelopment, Live Music and Public Space: Cultural performance and the re-making of Marrickville’ (2004) confirms many of the socio-political shifts that underpin the history of the Sandringham Hotel. The article looks at the Marrickville Council organised “live from …” live music events, the reasons for, and effects of these community based, mostly acoustic music performances held in public parks within the Marrickville Council’s local government area (LGA). This LGA covers the location of the Sandringham Hotel and the authors mention the closing of the venue, describing the place as “one of the main pub rock institutions in inner Sydney” (2004:76). The authors discuss shifts in the economic demographic that has led the area on a ‘narrative’ of gentrification. This narrative has seen rent prices increase, average house prices increase rapidly, and noise complaints force the closure of some popular music venues. The authors identify several reasons that could account for the changes to what once was a more vibrant arts community that supported many more live music venues than it does at the time of writing.

Through interviews conducted with people involved with the Council’s communication and cultural services division, and other stakeholders, the issues of changing age and economic demographics of the local population are joined with problems posed by local musicians not moving music practices to reflect the wants of the changing audience. Data from the Vanishing Acts (Johnson & Homan, 2003) report is include to verify conclusions made about the effects of these issues on live music events. The Council sponsored music events are found to be successful in providing accessible avenues for musicians and audiences to enjoy live performances, but do not satisfy the need for more live venues to be available to emerging artists, and the subsequent increase of cultural capital within the LGA. The authors make clear their support for these events, and how their instigation was never considered a solution for the problems of venue closures.
Many, “if not all” (Gibson & Homan, 2004: 81) the issues contributing to closures are beyond the control of one local government initiative, and State and Federal governance predominates. The public sphere for the enjoyment of live music has moved from pubs to venues where parents of young children can enjoy performances. The predominance of ‘Oz rock’ forms and behaviours has diminished as the audience that supported those forms in their youth now prefer (and attend in greater numbers) performances offered in open public spaces. “New articulations of place” (ibid) are negotiated, therefore, write the authors, and the public sphere changes to reflect the changing circumstances in the LGA. Although the authors mention the changing tastes of potential audience members, and include one ex-venue manager’s views on the inability of musicians to cater for new tastes, no discussion of music genre, either required or rejected, takes place. The authors also do not disclose their personal knowledge of the area, both being active participants in local live music scenes.

The rare (in academic writing) mention of the Sandringham Hotel, and the survey of political/cultural climate of the time and the area make this article of clear interest to the Sandringham study. The Marrickville Council live event initiative sought, in part, to replicate many of the factors that supported the vibrant music-making culture that were made evident and referred to by interviewees in my study. Gibson and Homan find these factors prevalent in many of the pub venues operating in Sydney in the 1980s and 1990s. My study further clarifies these factors and identifies specific factors in the experiences of most of the interviewees being their ‘feelings of community’, their involvement in rituals of the place and the way this influenced their processes of identification with the site, and the effects the unique architecture had on their involvement. This is something that has never been done before either in Australia, or in inner-city rock music venues overseas. The article’s interviewee’s thoughts on the difficulties with musicians not updating their music practice to suit the changing tastes of local people has not been supported by data collected in this study or by my personal experience. Musician practices are broad in the LGA under discussion, and many new ‘underground’ (and illegally operating) venues are open providing places for newer and more marginal forms of musical expression. Bernie Hayes, an interviewee for my study, launched his last album at a day-time gig in a licensed club, and the dance-floor immediately in front of the band was crowded
with under 5 year-old children. But this is one live show by a performer who has built a solid support base over twenty-five years of playing in the area. The parents of these children are part of the demographic Gibson and Homan describe as being less interested in live music attendance, and I agree that their attendance at pub rock music events has diminished as they have aged. Their study, coupled with the *Vanishing Acts* (Johnson & Homan, 2003) report, provides much needed research into finding ways of building productive and supportive live music places in a city that, as the quote heading this chapter points out, under-values and needs them.

**Looking from Inside**

As an inside researcher, writings about the role and effects on data of researching from this privileged position were useful in a reflexive analysis process. Valerie Yow (1997) surveys the disciplines that use interviewing as a research method looking for areas where the interviewer’s reactions to interview became a topic for academic investigation. In the 1970s and 1980s, Yow explains, oral history textbooks ignored the effects the process of interviewing had on the interviewer, and how this subsequently influenced the analysis of the data collected. She includes motives for conducting research, personal feelings about the narrator, reactions to stories told, and the effects of preconceptions in the minds of researchers, and the effects of the researcher’s self-awareness or self-concept in the discussion.

Yow looks to Ronald Grele’s interview with Studs Terkel, in *Envelopes of Sound* (1991), and the introduction by Alice Kessler Harris, for early appearances of the acknowledgement of interviewers’ personal attachments to subjects, and responses to their subjects’ stories. The book concentrates on the process of oral history methods, but as Grele mentions in the preface, touches on the “more difficult questions of subjectivity” (pg xi). This may be a clue as to why it took until the late 1990s for these researcher influences to become a relevant topic, inclusive as it must be of areas including linguistics, psychology, and philosophy. The question Yow asks is not whether historians should appear in histories; they invariably do, but how are they to appear? Should the feelings of researchers be expressed clearly, or left for the reader’s speculation? Undeclared ideologies can be misread or ignored and this can
have a strong impact on the researcher’s perceived objectivity and therefore de-value any research outcomes. Yow documents Theodore Rosengarten’s discussions of love for the subject, and also Abraham Kaplan’s phenomenological view of the researcher coming to the subject with prior knowledge, whatever that may constitute. Victor Turner, the anthropologist I use to read ritual processes from the Sandringham, states that the researcher can have “an objective relation to one’s own subjectivity” (Yow, 1997: 5). Feminist theorists of the 1970s and 1980s rejected the dominant ‘objectivity’ paradigm of (predominantly male) scientific enquiry because it ignored important issues of subjectivity, relationship and consciousness. Mainstream economic, political, sociological and psychological sciences remain with the ‘objective’ and ‘scientific’ views as dominant, Yow writes. Ethnography, feminism and qualitative sociology have shifted to a view that is inclusive of interactive process awareness, where an active dialogue between interviewer, narrator and content is acknowledged. Historians have yet to reached a consensus, she reports.

The goal in her view is to aim for research outcomes that document the entire context of the work. The emphasis need not shift to the internal world of the researcher wholly, but to ignore the effects experienced by interviewers throughout the process ignores also a vital research tool. Issues of gender and age differences can have an effect on what the interviewer thinks is important and these preconceptions limit the scope of any broad study of a particular topic. Narrator’s stories may trigger emotional memories for interviewers and Yow agrees with Barbara Erskine that shared emotional exchanges during the interview process lead to better interviewing. She poses seven questions the researcher may ask him/herself, and these provide a good example of methodological process guideposts to increasing self-awareness throughout the oral history recording study.

This paper has had a profound effect on my understanding of the personal dynamics of interviewing, particularly interviewing people I know and continue to interact with outside this process. Due to my insider status, my choices of interviewee and the questions asked have been heavily contaminated by my own experience, and memory of experience, of the Sandringham Hotel. Understanding my history in relation to the venue has helped me set objective parameters in seeking to bring some
aspects of the venue’s history to light. As discussed in the section outlining my involvement above, the experience of a long process of psychotherapy offered a complete reassessment of my daily external dealings with the world and this resulted in changes to my thought process and decision making skills. I was a different person during the time the study covers, but so were the interviewees and we all are relying on memory. Yow’s paper encourages me to consider the play of minds, mine and my preconceptions of the interviewee’s, evident in the narratives transcribed. I am enervated to read the way other researchers from other disciplines have considered their interactions with their subjects, and the ways they have considered the impact their own thinking has had on the data collected.

Elaine Rabbitt (2003) discusses the advantages and disadvantages of collecting oral histories from people known to her, and who live in her local area. One distinct advantage Rabbitt identifies is the access she has to interview subjects. Being a project focusing on women who migrated to a remote area, Rabbitt’s many years of community based work in the area helped in this identification process. Ethical issues are highlighted, especially issues of cultural sensitivity. Her geographic location, in northern Western Australia, is peopled by various ethnic groups including Filipino, Aboriginal and Anglo-Celtic people. She discusses the various ways these different people were approached, explaining the cultural significance of each approach.

As with my study, participants were offered the option of anonymity. Only one of her interviewees requested this option (as with mine) and Rabbitt states that the events in the interview were therefore subject to “masking of descriptive data” (pg 6) in order to preserve her anonymity, but the extent of this masking is not discussed. This brings me to consider the request for anonymity from my one participant and the degree to which I can ethically ‘protect’ his/her identity while continuing the historical narrative of the project. My interviewee discusses the house s/he lived in, in relation to the Sandringham, and this geographical marker is such that people could easily identify the person. I am called to think carefully about how this material can be included, valuable as it is, in an ethical manner. Rabbitt highlights the importance of the existing relationships with the interviewees to not only facilitate trust within the interview, but to engender trust with regard to the ultimate
use of the oral histories collected. Participants in her study expressed concern about the end use of the stories they told, wanting assurances that any further use (other than the within the thesis) would be made known to them. I made mention of this issue with my interviewees, but none expressed concern. Many suggested a more commercial use could be made and were enthusiastic to participate further if that option arose.

Another important point discussed in this paper concerned the ‘conversational’ approach to interviewing, and I am encouraged to find support for this way of collecting data. As an insider, and as discussed in the ‘interviews’ section above, it may have been the only approach to interviews available considering the degree to which I was familiar with the participants. I had shared houses with several of the interviewees, and any pretence to formality, particularly within this underground rock music scene, could have placed undue boundaries on the historical data offered during the process. Familiarity was a vital part of the conceptualization of the project, so any recourse to a more formally structured data collection process would have been at odds with the project’s aims.

Jill Brown’s ‘Seduction and Betrayal Revisited: Ethical Dilemmas of Insider Research’ (2004), like Rabbitt’s essay, explores the advantages and disadvantages apparent in research conducted by people who sit within the groups being researched. If it begins in the negative, describing the ultimate result of the process of qualitative research as “seduction and betrayal”, it does so in a positive way. Brown’s description of the meaning associated with qualitative research, meanings largely held by only the researchers themselves, clarifies the process and causes me to focus on the ethical implications of the research I conduct. Brown asks us to understand that social groups operate with underpinning, almost assumed constructs that are the product of that social group. Any study of the group must address these, Brown suggests, bringing these “understandings” to the fore, and connecting these with a broader world in order to promote greater understanding. Due to our inherent subjectivity, Brown argues that any story we tell is always our own story. Understandings can be shared but the contexts, times, emotions, psychological underpinnings and it seems, myriad other notions are not transferable in a complete
way. The page, the word, or the very act of documentation, intervene and the truth is lost. Thus the subjects are ‘betrayed’ in her view.

The meaning of any research is movable, and participants, the researcher, and the reader all construct different meanings from essentially the same research, Brown argues. Brown outlines her research among English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers working in Victorian schools. There are great advantages and disadvantages with the ‘insider’ position, she states. Participants are more willing to give detailed descriptions of their work, knowing that the interviewer has internal knowledge of the system the interviewee works with. The ‘retelling’ of their experience can be problematic though, with any discrepancy seemingly amplified by the perceived understanding and candour the ‘insider’ initially invoked. Problematic also, Brown says, are the ‘mirroring’ and supplication issues that persist between interviewer and subject. While she tends to ‘see’ herself in others’ practice (mirroring), the people interviewed tend to modify their positions to please the perceived expectations of the interviewer, or so she acknowledges as possible. Ethical dilemmas arise when participants move from the professional to the personal, and Brown makes explicit her response of turning off the tape recorder when these subjects come up. Brown also supplies the participants with transcripts and a covering letter asking for clarifications and thanking them for their participation. In these ways, she argues, ethical issues are minimised. I have avoided supplying participants with transcripts of their interviews in the Sandringham project.

Brown takes the view that open-ended conversation, or unstructured interviews, are the best way to realise useful data, or the best way to replicate as near as possible the multitude of narratives available to any researcher. She sees this process as indicative of the ESL community itself, open to multi-meaninged ‘others’, conducted in an atmosphere of working for common understanding and inclusion. Offering participants a “dissenting voice” narrative, post analysis, satisfied Brown with relation to her having viewed interviewees in a negative light.
Insiders and Rock Music

Considering another colour in the approach spectrum, academia in Australia has also shown interest in the relationship between political culture and rock music culture. Marcus Breen’s *Rock Dogs: politics and the Australian music industry* (1999) is a historical study that moves the engagement with popular music into to the Australian political sphere. It is also a history written from an insider perspective. Breen looks at first the Victorian, then the Federal Labor Party’s policies concerning rock music, and therefore youth culture, during their times in office. The implicit understanding here is that there was a shift in governmental understanding concerning the place popular music-making inhabits in the Australian cultural field. Breen points to the increased income being derived from overseas sales of Australian popular music, and maps this increased income in parallel to the increased interest of governmental support for grass-roots music making. Through extensive reading of public policy documents, Hansard records, interviews with politicians and rock protagonists, and through close personal involvement with the Victorian Rock Foundation (VRF), he builds a narrative of the attempt by government to codify and clarify the production of popular music in Australia between 1982 and 1998 (approx.).

What interests me here is the way rock music slips almost unseen between the cracks in government policy. As Simon Frith (1983) and Richard Middleton (1990; 2006) (to name two of many) have identified rock music as an expression of youth rebellion, could this be implicit in rock lifestyle/subculture, and therefore preclude or reject any understanding from a perceived ‘mainstream’ political culture? If this is true, and the style/culture refuses to sit, constantly avoiding definitive labels, how can I best document this shifting nature in a thesis that supposes to set a history of a live music based venue? In some ways, my thesis attempts this same documenting process, but in other ways it moves away from historical narrative. By using verbatim interviews or oral histories as the prime data source, the single story becomes many storied. Although unseen and largely unacceptable to cultural institutions the music-making at the Sandringham was very visible to those who lived it, and the interviewees help us see this.
Another interesting feature of Breen’s mostly dry analysis of historical events is the way in which he approaches his own involvement as a board member and eventually chairperson of the VRF. He acknowledges differences in recollections concerning the events that led to VRF’s inception and offers first hand accounts of meetings, objectives, successes and failures in an even handed way. His dispassionate view offers me encouragement that a slightly distanced, historical voice can be offered to a narrative that was personally all-consuming at the time. This close involvement with the story being recounted can offer an on-the-ground understanding of the actions individuals take, and this in turn builds a clearer understanding of the collective results that grow from these individually motivated actions.

Robert Gordon’s *It came from Memphis* (1995) uses his personal engagement with his hometown, Memphis, to tell a story of music and music production that although mostly unheard, played a part in harmonies whistled around the world. Recognised record labels like Stax and Sun, genre descriptors like Delta blues, and performers like Elvis Presley, the Rolling Stones, Booker T, and many others played early roles on the Memphis stage, or drew fundamental inspiration from the events described in this foundational American music-making city. Having grown up in Memphis, Gordon moves out from his own teenage discovery of the blues to see a larger, wider story, whose players continue playing. While San Francisco in 1966 saw the emergence of an LSD laced “acid test” subculture, Memphis engendered a parallel LSD subculture in 1965, and one sub-narrative explored in the history is the direct trail that connects a San Francisco based organic chemist (‘Bear’ Owsley), and his chemistry to the music subculture of Memphis.

Gordon tracks and interviews the participants of the mid-sixties arts movement in the city, and opens a field of rich history around this and other ‘scenes’. His approach tells the stories, sometimes horrific, while avoiding sensationalism and positioning the events in relation to the town, the music and the culture. Of interest here is the way this author’s approach is broad, allowing numerous contact points with the cultural history of the place, sometimes political, sometimes personal, and sometimes social; an approach I’m aiming for in this Sandringham project.
The importance of including non-musicians in historical research focussed on music-making finds clear expression in Roman Kozak’s *This Ain’t No Disco: the story of CBGB* (1988). This book comes closest to an approach I sought for the Sandringham study. The CBGB was a club in New York’s Bowery, renowned for its down-at-heel, ramshackle operations. Yet many groups that began playing the venue reached international audiences. These include Blondie, The Ramones, Talking Heads, Mink DeVille and others. Many of the people involved in the club, managers, bar-staff, patrons and band members are interviewed for Kozak’s book, and their stories are interwoven to offer a vivid picture of a site now famous. Kozak offers many stories, some that begin at CBGB and then travel nationally and internationally as the bands talk of the touring they did. This has the effect of placing the site within a national context. We hear of the subcultural similarities and differences that build an evocative picture of the site. Issues discussed include the ‘entertainment over profit’ motive that sat as a guiding principal in the establishment of the bar. Highlighted are the social interactions and musical collaborations between regular patrons, and also various legal and social issues that arose. There are many parallels here with the culture that grew at the Sandringham Hotel. Kozak was a regular patron at the bar and thus brings an insider view to his book. He avoids however, any theory that could have led him to posit some idea of what made the site the productive space it became. The Sandringham study moves to offer some theory as to why such an underground, non-mainstream venue provided space for the realisation of music that had an impact on the mainstream popular music culture.

**Scenes**

Writing about the Sandringham encompasses areas of academic investigation concerned with the notion of ‘scene’. Straw (1991a) notes that while academia struggles to understand ‘scene’, the concepts involved permeate any writing or discussion of urban cultural activity. Drawing on his study of the Montreal disco subculture in the 1970s Straw (1991b) charts a scene’s active ingredients. In his view scenes remain indecipherable due to their propensity to move in several directions simultaneously, toward more complex manifestations of themselves and toward mediated spaces in relation with their surroundings.
That essay also looks at historical studies that show scenes developing from increases in population, coupled with a subsequent paucity of opportunities for prospective participants. Straw points to several instances of this phenomenon and how it has driven artists to establish scenes that have become culturally significant. His essay leads me to ask if the high number of bands the Sandringham Hotel spawned could be more rightly linked to the lack of venues in the scene as the reason the music made there, or the scene that thrived there, has become culturally important. As a study of Sydney’s inner city live music venues found (Homan, 2003a), the scene/s in Sydney negotiate an array of hurdles in remaining viable and open to community music-making and enjoyment. The more recent closure of the Hopetoun Hotel (Tovey, 2009) highlights the ephemeral nature of any place based inner city rock music scene. For the Sandringham study, the notion of scene is useful, but not essential since the boundary of the locale encapsulates the actions being studied. As Straw notes, scenes spread, and the scene at the Sandringham spread across the road, the suburb, and across the nation, but this study is bounded by the place’s walls. Some interviewees mention ‘scene’, but the idea expressed has more negative connotations. A ‘scene’ is a mediation of the real, not authentic in the eyes of the Sandringham community. Bondi is more a ‘scene’ in this way of thinking, aligned with ‘fashion’ and a certain pretentiousness, rather than the down-and-outness and hence perceived authenticity of the Sandringham. Ultimately each is a mediated scene with sanctioned behaviours and ways of being communicated through the rituals formed and acted out within the bounds set by participants who choose to identify with the places. The Sandringham is best understood as a diverse community, and one unique in its expression of, and support for, the music that permeated the place.

In order to understand unique scenes, researchers must be open to taking unique steps according to Mark Slobin (1993). Slobin takes a broad view of musics made by various peoples in this comprehensive study. Building from his ethnomusicological work in Afghanistan in the late 1960s, he moves geographically eastward, through central Asia, to Europe and across the Atlantic to the United States. In all these places he identifies small enclaves of music-making, and each one he studies is seen to define itself in relation to what is seen as a bigger system. Notions of ‘ours’ and
‘theirs’ delimit the thinking around the practice and it is this thinking rather than the playing, that Slobin sees as important. His methodological discussion raises interesting points about schools of investigation and the prevailing drives of these. Anthropology, he argues, is moving more inward, asking researchers to look at their local areas and also at themselves as worthy of deeper understanding. Cultural theorists are moving steadily outward, he notes, to position local networks within broad narratives that are being constructed by an ever more persuasive electronic media, that now reaches more isolated, local cultures.

Slobin’s discussion on the positioning of the self in relation to the work is of most interest to me here. He argues that the self becomes the field in a few subtle ways. He agrees that the self has a ‘locked in’ perspective of the ‘other’ that pervades any study. However, his own long experience tells him that this boundary between self and other is not so simple to define. As academia unpacks stories of larger networks, identifying, then exploiting (at times to the benefit of) smaller music-making scenes, the old perspectives that built theories of non-compatibility have been shifted. In early engagements with foreign musics (foreign from Western art music perspectives), ‘Oriental’, ‘folk’ and ‘primitive’ were the identified options for the placement of perspectives brought to the study. With the identification of overarching power structures that straddle micro-cultures, and an increased focus on less defined interrelationships between macro-media and micro-traditions, places of unique creativity have chipped away at the more defined ways we, as outsiders, think about particular scenes. We can see similarities with our ‘home’ situations because the mediums operated in the same way, with sometimes the same perceived deficiencies in these ‘other’ cultures. The moments of music-making are as important as the oppositional perspective, he seems to argue, and with each new study, ethnomusicologists are asked to provide unique lenses to fully understand the micro-cultures, and also to wear these new lenses, to see themselves in new ways within the study. In light of this advice, the Sandringham study has applied a new way of looking at the micro-culture of the place. No other study has used interview narratives to find how a music-making venue built and maintained its culture.
Drinking and Drugs

“Alcohol has formed an essential component in the mythology of Oz Rock performances” (Homan, 2003a: 15), and all interviewees acknowledged the strong influence these substances had on the Sandringham Hotel’s culture. Writings about alcohol and drug use and abuse with relation to music-making include insider narratives, like Clinton Walker’s ‘Co-dependent: A Potted History of Drugs and Australian Music’ (2002). In this, more journalistic article, Walker looks to document the clear links between drug taking and music-making in the history of Australian rock music. Cursory mentions of international artist’s use of drugs and alcohol are made when appropriate, but the thrust of the essay is the close relationship Australian musicians have had and continue to have with illicit drug use.

Walker argues that if music can affect mood, and if drugs also affect mood, putting them together is an obvious and enjoyable combination. The effects of music can be enhanced, he writes, when coupled with the drug that best suits the music and occasion. There are many personal opinions here, mostly rising from the author’s experience of drug taking and music appreciation. Walker claims ‘insider’ status when talking about the 1980s rock scene in inner Sydney, talking of his heroin habit and how it seemed to him that everyone was using needles at that time.

Walker mentions the Sydney Trade Union Club, Oxford St, Kings Cross and other geographical markers of the rock scene, and discusses how these markers coloured Paul Kelly’s 1985 album Post. The album remains one of Australian rock’s best loved recordings, he explains, citing a 1998 critics poll that placed it at eight among all-time best Australian records. Walker knew all involved on the album personally, and explains some of the more obtuse (and obvious) references to heroin use contained in the lyric content. Some personal histories are included highlighting the context of the record’s inception, and some of the cathartic incidents that find voice on the album are narrated. These add to the understanding of the album’s continuing popularity, and provide something of a history of the Sydney rock scene at the time; one source to check narratives offered by participants in my study against.
In relation to the Sandringham study, much as Walker’s essay could be perceived as a glorification of illicit drug use, it does give a clear understanding of the prevalence of drugs and alcohol in the Sydney music-making scene in the 1980s and 1990s, the decades covered in my study. Much as I aim to discuss the actions and events that constitute the daily running of the hotel in a more academic, anthropological way, like Walker’s approach here my own involvement in drug taking (as well as music-making) will need to be discussed. The unexpurgated experiences of living and working at the hotel colour my recollection, as Walker believes drug use colours any understanding of rock music in Australia. Any judgement of positive and negative consequences of such use must be left to the reader of the study. I aim to be open and honest in describing my role in any of the events that arise from the interviewee’s narratives, and the reader will no doubt keep in mind my closeness to the events and make any corrections in the weights and measures they feel the need to make.

Academic writing has begun to look at the performance perspectives of effects drugs and alcohol can have on musicians engaged in group music-making. David Lenson (1998) begins his discussion by outlining the links between 1960s counter-culture in the USA, and Romanticism in the arts, typified by Keats, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley and others. Lenson quotes Coleridge at length, looking for the Romantic poet’s sense of a “stoned” (pg 25) imagination. The author lists famous writers and the drugs they used, arguing that the written record, the writer’s own accounts, are our window to see the wider use of drugs by other arts practitioners, like musicians and painters.

It is the musician’s use of drugs that interests Lenson here, with a particular emphasis on improvisation, thus linking the ‘imagination’ Coleridge previously pondered with the in-the-moment composition musical improviser’s display. Lenson outlines a concept he says is known among blues musicians as ‘ESP’. A musician knows what to play, how to play, and when to stop, after they have been ‘initiated’, and Lenson says his initiation came from Muddy Waters in a spoken confirmation, an almost ritual-like inclusion into Waters’ family. He thus emerges as an ‘insider’ in this dialogue, a person who has experienced the events and feelings he writes about. He finds his ‘initiated’ status confirmed two years after the gig with Muddy Waters, when he plays in the backing band for John Lee Hooker, finding that Hooker had “an eerie confidence” (pg 28) in backing musicians he had never met before. Lenson
writes that as ensemble playing requires agreed chord progressions (‘free’ musicians need not apply), levels of drug intake are also agreed. The right level of the right drugs enhances the ESP, he argues, and lists the drugs and their benefits and or consequences for ensemble music playing. Alcohol is included in his discussion as a drug. His discussion on the role of soloist in an ensemble setting is predicated on the acceptance of a chord progression based ensemble practice. That he ignores a more ‘pure’ form of musical improvisation, where the potential soundscape is cleared of all preconceptions or idiomatic markers renders his discussion not un-useful, but limited, perhaps in a similar way to the expressive and sonic limitations of the western tonal system he bases his notion of improvisation on. Lenson maps improvisation in rock music to the consciousness altering states induced by marijuana, alcohol and other drugs. His view is limited in parts, particularly when he divides the post-1975 rock scene into three distinct genres (disco, punk and heavy metal) and his argument that improvisation is limited by the western tonal and rhythmic system. Non-idiomatic ‘free’ improvisers have cleared this hurdle. Lenson exposes his broad philosophical reading as well as his narrow experimental music listening (and playing). Useful to the Sandringham study is the way Lenson sees drug use and art-making as inseparable across a broad swathe of history. He describes the unspoken rituals that predicate successful ensemble playing, and these are similar markers I look for in the rituals practiced at the Sandringham. I am interested in the levels of intoxication he describes as useful to better ensemble playing, although my experience at the Sandringham makes the audiences inclusion in this calculation essential.

Conducting human research with people who use or are under the influence of drugs (including alcohol) could invite criticism of the results of such research. Past studies conducted in drug-effected settings have yielded accurate and long overdue data. Philippe Bourgois’ In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio (1995) provided a solid basis for approaching people who used, or were under the influence of drugs during the interviews for the Sandringham study. Bourgois’ study maps the social relationships of a group of people who live and work in East Harlem (El Barrio), Manhattan, and their networks within, and to some degree outside of, the crack (crystallised cocaine) market that dominates their lives. The author explains in the introduction that his aim of writing a book about poverty in New York City, and his
limited financial support, led him to take an apartment in East Harlem, an area dominated by City owned, subsidised housing blocks. The original focus of his work, documenting the black market economy of a poor neighbourhood, was overtaken by the crack “cyclone” the engulfed the people he was interviewing from 1985 when he moved into the area, to 1990 when he left. Bourgois explains how, although being racially separated from the people he interviewed, he being ‘white’ and his subjects mostly ‘Nuyorican’, his ability to speak Spanish, and being married to a person of Spanish ethnic background eased his entry to his subject’s lives. He spends many hours with several people, although the study concentrates on about five individuals. All these subjects sell and use crack cocaine, as well as heroin, marijuana, alcohol and other intoxicants.

Descriptions of their use of these substances and explanations of their effects are documented during the transcriptions of the recorded interviews. “[(S)niffing from the pile of heroin and passing me a quart of Bacardi]”, “[sniffing then swigging]” (pg 125-126) appear as explanatory entries for the reader, bringing them into a world highly mediated by illegal substances. I found myself remembering the level of inebriation prevalent, and in a number of ways actively encouraged, at the Sandringham Hotel during my time working and performing there. In the same way that Bourgois dispassionately documents the use of drugs and alcohol by his interviewees, all references to such use by my interviewees is similarly acknowledged. Admittedly, the use (and abuse) of such substances in music-making scenes has been the focus of academic writing (Champney-Smith, 2003; Lenson, 1998; Walker, 2002), but it remains a side issue in my study, not inconsequential but acknowledged as a part of the daily activities ritualised at the site. Bourgois approaches these issues in an open and ethical way, partly by frequent inclusion of statistical information, and also by quoting other researchers who have struggled with the ethics of studying socially marginalised groups.

In the heat of daily life on the streets of El Barrio I often experienced a confusing anger with the victims, the victimizers, and the wealthy industrialized society that generates such an unnecessarily large toll of human suffering (Bourgois, 1995: 17).
In a similar way, but not to the same degree of ‘anger’, I felt that the participants in my study who use drugs were victims of a society that de-values popular culture making and particularly ignores music-makers. Like Bourgois, I struggle with the voyeur interest in drug addled rebelliousness, wanting more to map the social realities that made the Sandringham a vibrant arts making community. Bourgois’ subjects are viewed in light of their relationships with the dominant ‘legal’ economy, their ‘street’ society (focussed on the crack economy), and their personal, internal narrative. Subjects discuss their want for a more ‘legal’ status within the culture, but transfer this unmet want to expressions of pride in their position within the ‘street’ culture.

The author documents the effects of the intoxicants on the subject’s health and social relationships, as well as on their behaviour during interviews with parenthetic descriptors like “[energized by a cocaine rush]”, and “[mellowing on a heroin ebb]” (pg 309). This approach encourages the reader to reposition the notion of ‘illegality’ in light of the humanistic way Bourgois allows his subjects freedom from the legal sanctions on the use of intoxicants. By acknowledging their use, but also the effects of their use on individuals, the families of the individuals and the communities they live in the author offers transparency, and we become increasingly concerned with the causes of destructive behaviour while acknowledging the consequences.

Bourgois discusses at length the effect his presence has on the lives of his subjects. “We love listening to you talk. It makes us laugh. You sound like a television advertisement” (pg 19) one eight year old tells him, highlighting the social dislocation of the suburb; the only non-Puerto Rican accent the child hears is from the television. Bourgois documents how the crack dealer enjoyed having him around as it gave other dealers cause to question any attack on their rival. Being white and socialising in this environment Bourgois was seen as either an undercover policeman or crazy.

He also expresses concern at exposing the behaviours of his subjects in light of other social researcher’s experiences. He quotes anthropologist Laura Nader who expressed concern for research data that supported stereotyping of the powerless and poor. Expressing concern at the possible pornographic and voyeuristic aesthetics of
much of his document he expresses his “worry about the political implications of exposing the minute details of the lives of the poor and powerless to the general public”, but qualifies his concerns by stating his belief that “ultimately the problem and the responsibility (are) also in the eyes of the beholder” (1995: 18).

Conclusion

The Sandringham study uses interview narratives to uncover the actions of individuals involved in running a seven-nights-a-week live music venue across the years 1980 until 1998. The venue was considered “one of the main pub rock institutions in inner Sydney” (Gibson & Homan, 2004: 76). Interviews were conducted with a mix of “conversation approach with an interview guide approach” (Patton, 1990: 282), with people who engaged with the hotel as either musicians, patrons, bar-staff or managers. Analysis of the transcribed interviews was inductive, generative, constructive, and subjective (Goetz & LeCompte, 1981), and as I had worked and performed at the venue for many years informed by my own understanding of the processes being described.

Several factors that underpinned the music-making culture that thrived at the site can be seen emerging from the collected data. The interviewee’s identification with the community that met at the place, the rituals formed around the day-to-day operation of the venue, and the unique architectural space at the hotel each had profound effects on the participants and on the ways music was made and enjoyed there. I also found that the strata of engagement positions set at the outset of the study (those of musician, patron, staff and manager), were undercut by the narratives the interviewees offered. Those I thought were patrons worked or performed at the site. Those I designated staff spent significant time socialising there. This has implications for researchers undertaking this type of research, especially as an insider.

The following chapters will discuss the influencing aspects of identity formation, feeling of community, ritual processes and the physical space more fully based on the narratives collected from the interviewees. The feeling of belonging to a
community, expressed by all interviewees, was enhanced by their participation in rituals formed and passed on over the years the venue operated. The rituals identified were designed to facilitate live performance in a venue not built specifically for that purpose, but that utilised a unique architectural space that left lasting impressions on all interviewees. The chapters that follow are based on the notions of ‘identity’, ‘community’, ‘ritual’ and the ‘place’ as experienced through the lives of those interviewed. Each chapter addresses one of the three elements that constitute the bounds of this investigation, being the people, the place and the music.
Chapter Two

Community – “but it was a different feeling and any pub you went to you never had that feeling”

Important to any understanding of the prevailing culture at the Sandringham hotel was the ‘feeling of community’ engendered, in part, by the participant’s involvement in the ritual processes instigated and maintained at the site for 18 years. The ‘feeling of community’ expressed by all the interviewees indicates an identification with a perceived group of people who frequented the site. As the quote above indicates, other pubs “never had that feeling” (M. Rees, personal communication, July 12, 2007), and this view was shared among interviewees. However, the perception of this community was highly individual, expressed in various ways. In this chapter I look to identify the factors that helped to engender this feeling in the participants and therefore how these factors influenced the culture of the place. By comparing the nature of each interviewee’s expressions of this feeling, looking to find what sort of community they felt this was, a clearer view of the prevailing culture will emerge. This discussion takes place, partly, in light of questions asked about whether a ‘scene’ (Straw, 1991b) operated at the venue. Participant’s views on the ‘scene’ were sometimes linked closely with how they interacted with the ‘community’, but also with the architecture of the place, so I am looking to confirm that “(i)dentity formation as a process of identification is a spatially situated process” (Hetherington, 1998: 17). I argue that the nightly ritual of music-making performed at the Sandringham Hotel, coupled with a shared participation in other events and incidents involving community members, led to a deeper sense of belonging to, and identification with the space.

Ritual and communitas

Organising ourselves around musical performance is ritualistic in that the process can be seen to “marshal a sense of communitas” (Finnegan, 2003:186). More than this, participation in ritual has been found to be reflective of the social organisation
that instigates their performance. They become a loop “in the linear progression” (Turner, 1987:25) of that culture’s everyday. Other ethno-anthropologists discussing music-making activities avoid the term ‘community’ (Cohen, 1993:128), with good reasoning pertinent to the context of their research, and prefer the term ‘pathways’ to describe individuals’ activities in and around music-making places. These music-making pathways were found to be but one of many lines of activity in individual’s lives, but were considered of “high value” (Finnegan, 2007:306) by the people involved. ‘Community’ is too ‘closed’ or ‘bounded’ for her purpose, her study being about a city and its various music-making people and places. In my study, however, interviewees use the language of ‘community’ to articulate their sense of attachment and belonging, so we need to consider how this language relates to the collective actions they participated in at the site. The various collective and individual actions of the people within the place formed and maintained what they see as a sense of community. The interviewees refer to what could be described as the “flow and flux of behaviour” (Cohen, 1993:128) that position the site as the central node of activity.

Hetherington (1998: 50) warns of the invocation of ‘community’ as an essentialist understanding of the ideas associated with identification and belonging. Individuals, in a world where multiple identities prevail, look for some expression of an authentic or grounded community where they can feel bonded to the ethos of the group and to a shared sense of common understanding. These various groups, whether advocating nationalistic pride or spiritual awakening are, however, subject to political and economic shifts and identification with them remains principally in the minds of each of their members. Maffesoli (1996) advocates a recognition of the substantiality of shared emotions stimulated through identification with communities, but views the feelings as based on an insubstantial, almost irrational belief in the internal connectivity of communities. It could be that the ‘feeling of community’ expressed by the interviewees for this study, “creates the conditions necessary for a sort of aura that characterises a certain period” (pg 197).

In analytical terms, the idea of communitas (Turner, 1969) is useful here also. This idea moves the focus of the group participants away from the structure itself and positions it more firmly on the effects actions and rituals have on the people participating. It encompasses the “emotional sense of community” (Fonarow, 2006:
shared between participants in rituals, as well as the “recognition of an essential and generic human bond” (Turner, 1969:97). One aspect of this concept is the manifestation of ‘liminal’ space within *communitas*. People inhabit structurally or socially indefinable spaces, or non-status personas, as they participate in ritual action, to emerge feeling more connected to those participating with them and to the community in which the ritual takes place.

As an indication of the problems inherent in positing an existing and definable community situated at the Sandringham, the participants in my study often describe the openness of the place to outside influences. They indicate a scene supporting a traffic of cultures and musics from the changing community the hotel serviced, and the creation of new ritual processes that assisted the building of *communitas*. Entertainment bookers actively sought to engage non-visiting but identified sub-groups among the local music-makers and supporters, thus undercutting this idea of an essentialist community. The blurring of roles I found when attempting to position interviewees in relation to the site speaks to the liminal space opened during these ritual enactments also. At times it mattered little what position you held in the group to those interviewed, but at others a perception of ‘insiderness’ identifies a hierarchy at play, anathema to the open attitude espoused by those who identified closely with the site.

**Re-making Place**

One physical area of the Sandringham where the activities of shared involvement helped to build a sense of community was the small and little used backyard at the rear of the hotel. This was a concreted courtyard no more than five to six metres squared. It was used daily for the storage of bins, and a small shed held cleaning products and implements. Patrons and musicians often used the yard on crowded nights to smoke joints, and staff dragged the rubber mats that lay on the floor of the bar area there after closing the doors each night. The mats were wet and heavy with the spillage from night’s bar work. It was considered a place away from the ‘public’ space, for rubbish, and for illicit behaviour. This was until some regular patrons
decided to make the space more useful. Bernie Hayes mentioned the space while explaining the general run-down look of the hotel in general.

Hayes: Sandy’s (owner) unwillingness to spend any money on maintenance meant that there’d be holes in the floor, big gaps where the lino had worn out and then rubble would come up and people would walk and fall over but she wouldn’t spend $100 to fix it up. And that beer garden thing, it was basically for the punters by the punters. Punters fixed up the beer garden. “Okay, what are we going to do out here? Okay, we need to fill all these potholes in. I can knock up some old furniture” you know, it was so left to the … what’s the word?

Smyly: Patrons?

H: Like a community club.

S: Yeah.

H: And I think Sandy found that by keeping her nose out in the end everything seemed to be going alright and the less she got involved, the less money she had to spend and left it to all the bands and things to try and keep this place going. (B. Hayes and J. Richardson, personal communication, Aug 16, 2007).

In Hayes’s view, the owner’s reluctance to adequately maintain the infrastructure of the venue opened the way for the regular patrons to invest time and money in making the place more habitable. Patrons of the hotel identified with the site to the extent that they felt free to claim the forgotten outdoor section at the rear of the venue as a social space (see Figure 2). Responsibility for the place was therefore transferred to the patrons and through their collective actions in remodelling this little-used back area, a greater sense of ownership was engendered. Hayes likens the actions of the people who remodelled the beer garden to those who would belong to a community club. “Punters”, (a term used for people who attend live performances) or those who were participating in improving the site, are mentioned as indivisible from “all the bands and things”, further illustrating the breakdown of roles or status levels evidenced within the community.

By calling this reclaimed space at the rear of the hotel a beer garden, Hayes brings up another example symbolic of what could described as the Sandringham’s ‘indie’ rock ethos, a community that “parodies its own proclivities.” (Fonarow, 2006: 53) The
Biergarten culture and architecture that spread from Munich in the 19th century (and is still prevalent in Australian hotels) is long and rich.

Figure 2 - Lachlan Dengate tends a BBQ in the Sandringham's backyard

This small cemented space behind the Sandringham, used for storage or as a thoroughfare to the back lane, could not rightly be called a beer garden in the traditional sense, or even when compared with other Australian places. There was no garden, no overly pleasant surrounds, but to the interviewees the irony of referring to it as such had become matter-of-fact.

During the interview process, people discussed events centred in or around the beer garden, and these narratives reveal how the people who frequented the hotel related to the space in a hands-on way. Popular music studies posit DIY (do-it-yourself) attitudes as a hallmark of ‘indie’, ‘punk’ or ‘post-punk’ music (Encarnacao, 2009; Fonarow, 2006; Laing, 1985) but this idea has yet to be mapped onto participants’ actions within music-making venues. Similar to the way performers viewed the nightly building and packing up of the stage, the beer garden was remade to become a useful and habitable social space, used at various times for fund raising events, ‘sausage sizzles’ (see Figure 2), and as a between-set resting space for musicians. As
the venue had no back-stage or band-room facilities the footpath, barely three steps from the stage, was the usual place for band members to drink and talk between sets. When policing of footpath drinking became strict the beer garden became a de-facto band-room, shared with audience members who were also looking to enjoy some fresh air, away from the small and often crowded venue space. The refurbishment of the beer garden by the people who frequented the hotel added to the sense of ownership of the place.

Nic Dalton mentions the sense of ownership he felt about the playing area as a direct result of having built the stage, discussed in the ‘Stage’ chapter (Chapter 3) of this thesis. In the same way, the patrons, operating like a “community club” in Hayes’ view, build their sense of ownership through investing time and effort (and money) in re-making the back area. After the venue closed, this feeling of community ownership became more apparent. Suzie Schlesinger, who booked the bands at the venue prior to Kirsty Lenthal taking the role, talked of the way people who frequented the site responded to the re-opened hotel, after the stage area had been filled with poker machines. I asked her how she felt about the hotel’s closure as a seven-nights-a-week venue.

Schlesinger: A mixture of kind of sadness and annoyance because I’d met the new owners, they came on board sort of half way through when I was there. I knew they were actually business people as well, they had a lot more, I think empathy with what we were trying to do in terms of the culture, but that was a business decision so I understood that, but of course it was like “where is everyone going to go?”, and also because I had been booking it I knew that it was so important as a place where people could get their first break, and I remember once going into it after they had sort of done those renovations and put the pokies in and changed…

Smyly: Yeah.

S: …in the first incarnation, not what it is now.

Sm: Right when the bar was still in situ, yeah.

S: They sort of changed the shape of the bar and I kind of walked past and thought I would just have a look and so I stuck my head in and the girl behind the bar said “do you want to come in?” and I said “no, no I was just having a look what you’ve done to the place”. She
said “you know so many people do that”. She said “why don’t they come in and have a drink?”

Sm: “Because we’re protesting.”

S: I am like “no, probably they were people that used to go to the Sando a lot and we’re just sort of coming in and seeing what happened to our room”.

Sm: Yeah.

S: There was a real sense of ownership I think.

Sm: Yeah.

S: Which made it really difficult for people to understand that the people that actually did own it had a right to do what they wanted with it and a lot of people had a sense of ownership about it, “hang on it’s our place”. “Well it’s not...

Sm: Yeah.

S: …sorry, you’ve made the culture but the walls and the bricks and mortar of the business aren’t ours. (S. Schlesinger, personal communication, Feb 28, 2008).

Schlesinger explicitly identifies the community as having a “real” sense of ownership over the place. She expresses concern for the people not having a place to go, even though the room had not, at that time, been substantially changed. Justin Hayes, musician and regular patron, describing his feeling on first arriving at the hotel during an interview with Bob Blunt (2001) said, “We were home.” (pg 253) Schlesinger’s reference to the individualistic “people” not being able to get a first gig, rather than collectivist ‘bands’ highlights the personal ties formed during her work there. At the time she speaks of, after the first closure (around February 1999 as Nic Dalton confirmed), all the staff had been replaced and poker machines had been placed in the space where the stage had been built, between the bar and the southern wall of the hotel. Bands no longer played at the venue.

In a broader context the action of replacing bands with gambling machines illustrates the move from live entertainment to static, screen based gambling that had become endemic in Sydney at the time, and has been highlighted in subsequent research (Homan, 2003a; Johnson & Homan, 2003). The effects on a vibrant culture of music-making is clear with the venue now moving its core business to alcohol sales and
gambling revenue. As a meeting point for musicians and live music supporters, the venue no longer operated in the same way. Changing the staff broke the community ties made clear in Lenthal’s interview earlier, where the close relationships between people in bands and the venue booker/manager facilitated the inclusive nature of the site. This transference of a sense of domestic space onto the public space, and the effects this had on the community interactions will be examined later in this chapter.

Schlesinger’s recollections suggest how the “culture” and the “bricks and mortar” were joined in the minds of the regular patrons. The physical space and the culture are inextricably linked here. By assuming the ‘business’ voice of the new owners at that point in the interview, she shows her understanding of the economic imperatives that separate ‘culture’ from ‘bricks and mortar.’ Schlesinger lets us see her underlying belief that they were closely linked at the site at the time. This culture was “built” by the people there, she notes, but the new owners did not recognise value in this.

Management for Community

Sandy Spooner’s lack of interest in the day-to-day running of the hotel, evidenced by the run-down nature of the building’s infrastructure, referred to by most interviewees, was mirrored in staff management practices. By keeping a disinterested distance from the usual managerial roles, people closely aligned with the community came to be in charge of the day-to-day operations of the site. Kirsty Lenthal explained how she became the pub’s manager at the relatively young age of 22.

Lenthal: I don’t know…. how I ended up with the managerial position of the bar was…just came out of the blue one day. Sandy went “I’m going to Byron Bay. Can you do the wages?”, and I used to do a bit of day shift, so I was like, “Sure. I can count money and do that sort of stuff,”…

Smyly: Yeah…

L: ….so I did the wages. She rang up and said, “I’m not coming back from Byron Bay for another couple of weeks. You have to do the rosters and the wages.” So, “Ok, sure, I know how to do it.” And that’s when Graham (Sandy’s life partner at the time), I don’t know
whether you were around at that stage; Graham, he was sort of living there and running the
bottle shop, and me and Kerry Ambler were pretty much, we were running the show, and he
was drinking a lot, and she went away. She (Sandy) kept going away, and coming back and
going away and coming back, and this one time, she sacked him, over the phone, in Byron
Bay and Kerry and I, we still weren’t told we were like managers or anything. We were just
being paid bar staff rates and working very long hours (K. Lenthal, personal communication,
July 17 and 23, 2007).

The passing of managerial roles to Lenthal and Kerrie Ambler had the effect of
opening the way for more hands-on involvement from the community of people who
frequented the hotel. Both Lenthal and Ambler were enthusiastic participants in
Sydney’s inner-city music scene. Lenthal had previously worked at the Lansdowne
Hotel, a venue that Nic Dalton refers to (personal communication, Sept 7, 2007) as
most similar to the Sandringham among the hotels offering live music in inner
Sydney at the time. In more top-down, managerially run establishments, finding a
new manager or licensee would involve advertising the position and interviewing
applicants, choosing one who best suited to the situation. Murray Rees’ (personal
communication, July 12, 2007) thoughts, included below, on the running and general
look of the Sandringham in comparison to his experiences working in London hotels
are illustrative here. The seemingly careless act of passing the managerial role to the
incumbent bar staff affected the culture of the place in several ways.

Handing the principal power roles to two young women who were well known to the
bands and patrons could be seen to affirm the sense of community ownership of the
site at that time (around 1993). If an ‘outsider’ had been brought in it is probable a
new set of managerial directives would have impacted on the operation of the site.
Occupational Health and Safety laws, if enforced, would have seen the milk-crate
stage replaced, not to mention the illegality of having the crates in the first place,
ending one of the defining rituals of the culture operating there. When the managerial
staff was changed, after the pub closed in late 1998 and re-opened without live
music, the decision was soon made to renovate the hotel. This renovation saw the
heritage listed bar removed, the feel of the venue being substantially changed, and
the community of regular patrons dispersed. Interviewees had strong thoughts about
Sandy Spooner, the owner at that time and descriptions of her role at the hotel can be
read in the interview transcripts. By removing herself from the scene, the opportunity
arose for regular patrons to involve themselves more fully and enthusiastically in the running of the hotel. However, the larger implications of running a non-profitable venue remained unaddressed. There was no overseeing owner/publican present to fill the role of a singular authority, or as Hayes mentioned earlier, to instigate the maintenance usually necessary for the smooth running of a seven-nights-a-week, live music venue. Lenthal was seen as part of the rock community, although still an authority figure, and her later role as licensee was another indication of the community ownership of the place. This identification with the place can be seen when elements of crisis or danger appeared.

Dancing around the Fire

The remodelled backyard area became the site of an incident, the various recollections of which highlight the prevailing attitude of collectivism that marked the hotel as the site of a bonded community. Both Phil Blatch and his band-mates from McBodybag, Harry Ree and Mark Hyland, recalled a fire that started in the shed at the back of the hotel. Blatch remembered the events as taking place on a Sunday night. Ree and Hyland clearly recall the incident as having taken place on a Tuesday night. These were both nights that the Hayes brothers (Stevie and Bernie) played regularly; Sunday in the Shout Brothers (with their brother Pat and Peter Velzen) and Tuesday as the Gruesome Twosome. It is interesting that the memory of the musicians who were performing on the night, rather than the day of the week, positioned the incident for the interviewees. Both accounts mention the firemen joining the patrons for beer after the fire was extinguished, confirming the prevailing view of the venue’s open ethos, however problematic in reality.

Blatch: I remember when there was a fire once when the Shouties were playing. When did the Shouties used to play? There was a fire there on a Sunday night and the shed was on fire…

Smyly: The shed out the back.

B: …and the firies came running in and put it out in about two minutes. Before the firies came it was funny because everyone was forming a line with buckets.
S: From the bar?

B: Yeah from the bar, or from the toilet I think and Bernie was organising the line of passing down the bucket so it was quite beautiful.

S: Old time…

B: And making no impact on the fire whatsoever but then the firemen put it out in two seconds and they went to the bar ordered six beers I think.

S: Have a listen to the band then.

B: Yeah, Bernie was dedicating songs to them (P. Blatch and L. Rowland, personal communication, June 6, 2007).

The incident is remembered as a time when the community joined together, led by Hayes, to collectively defend the venue from fire. In a different venue, one with an authority figure present, or with staff not so closely associated with the patrons and musicians, it could be assumed that patrons would be ushered to safety outside the establishment, while staff checked the adjacent rooms for other people. The fire brigade would then be left to deal with the fire. At the Sandringham, the patrons joined with the staff and the musicians to form a line, and to pass buckets of water filled from the bar (or toilets), to be thrown on the fire. “It was quite beautiful”, Blatch recalls indicating his affection for the community.

He places Bernie Hayes as the organiser, a role Hayes is invested with by community consent in other situations that are discussed elsewhere in this thesis. The openness of the community is reflected in the firemen’s decision to enjoy a beer, and listen to the music after the fire is extinguished. In Harry Ree’s account, Blatch is placed as a prime player in the narrative as the person who raised the alarm, and I remind him about the community bucket line story having heard it from Blatch. The issues around mythologising local scenes is discussed elsewhere, (Connell & Gibson, 2003; Mitchell, 1996) and my involvement as an insider and researcher bring the mechanics of the narrative building process to the fore in this example. Blatch placed the ‘beauty’ of the collective bucket passing and the tragi-comic efforts of the community as seen in light of the firemen’s “two seconds” work as most important. Ree remembers in a different way.
Ree: Remember the Gruesome Twosomes night there was a fire?

Hyland: I wasn’t there.

R: It was actually Phil Blatch who was actually having a piss in the urinal, there was a window above the urinal, he looked out in the backyard and he actually said he spotted a fire.

H: In the kitchen.

R: You could actually see it through the toilet so he said he finished his piss.

S: I think it was in the shed actually.

R: It was in the shed, okay, yeah but it was coming out from the back and I think Davis was on. I’m pretty sure Davis was on. No, Gregan was on so he’s called the firies and the firies have turned up and they’ve gone through the pub and they’ve put the fire out and I remember Bernie and Stevie started playing “Come on Baby Light My Fire” (singing) and then “Fire”, you know the Pointer Sisters song. But the firies all had a beer there while they were listening. It was a great night.

S: Someone told me they started a bucket chain.

R: Yeah, that’s right.

S: Everyone got up and started passing the buckets out. It didn’t do anything for the fire but everyone felt really good about it; “we’re doing something”.

R: But I do remember the firies stuck around for a beer afterwards. That was really good (M. Hyland and H. Ree, personal communication, Aug 28, 2008).

The main focus in this account is on the song choices by the musicians, made in response to the incident. This humorous response could be analysed in several ways. In authentic ‘indie’ music, “(t)he trick…is to appear as if the barriers between audience, performer, music, and emotion are temporarily effaced.” (Fonarow, 2006) The fire in the shed affects all the participants in the room, shifting the focus from the performers to the fire. Staff, performers, and patrons join as equals in the bucket line, as recalled by Blatch. The usual differences between these participatory roles are over-reached by the action taken in response to the fire, this being not a regular part of the Tuesday (or Sunday) night ritual, both being Hayes brother’s regular gigs (see Figure 3). Then the fire is shared, or re-lit, as musical celebration, being
memorialised in the humour of pertinent song choices. We could also look at this incident in terms of the ritual process of the regular Tuesday (or Sunday) night gig involving the Hayes brothers, and particularly their roles in, a) organising the bucket line, in Blatch’s recollection, and, b) making spontaneous humour with song choices.

Figure 3 - Brothers Bernie and Anthony Hayes (Stevie Plunder) as Gruesome Twosome. This photo appeared as part of a Sandringham calendar for 1994.

Turner (1969) identified the importance of the role of the ‘jester’ in his anthropological studies of Zambian village life. Rituals are an integral part of communitas, he proposes, binding those who participate in these prescribed processes to each other, and to the history of the people who have participated in them before. He identifies several roles that held great importance within the processes, including the ‘fool’ who holds power over those in the liminal space opened by ritual. The ‘fool’ is generally someone of low status in village life, and has little or no power over others in everyday situations, but who guides those immersed in the non-status, liminal space. The ‘trickster’ is at play in this story from the Sandringham. The musician, in Blatch’s account, is the organiser guiding others during the bucket line fire drill. He slips roles thereafter and we see the musician
making light of the dangerous situation, while displaying musical prowess in playing well loved tunes, chosen in a moment of camaraderie shared with the other participants in a regular weekly gig. This further illustrates the ritual nature of the processes that bonded the community at the Sandringham hotel at the time. Although bonded, the tastes and genre acceptances at the site were not limited or exclusive as can be seen in the choice of ‘fire’ songs by the musicians.

**Diversity in Community**

Kirsty Lenthal who, as mentioned earlier, became the hotel licensee and entertainment booker around 1993, talked about what she saw as defining characteristics of the different groups that congregated in the Newtown area. Lenthal was in a position to notice musical genre/taste divides operating in the area, and felt it important that these divides be bridged by booking bands that attracted particular groups of fans. She looked to unify people she supposed to have similar values or similar positions in relation to the broader mainstream community.

Lenthal... I think that what it comes down to is that most of the people that went there are all black sheeps, you know what I mean? They were all black sheeps. We started to involve, you know, when I came on board and started booking, I mean I was working before I started booking, but when I came on board to book, tried to involve some more, you know how there were other pubs up the road?

Smyly: Yeah.

Lenthal: There was a hard-core scene and there was the punks. I tried to integrate that more, tried to integrate the whole of the community. The youth or people that were interested in music, tried to integrate that into the whole pub. So on Sundays we’d have Shout Brothers in the evening, but on a Sunday afternoon we’d have the Blitz Babies and you know….

S: They still play.

L: Yeah, they just had a reunion gig.

S: I saw it advertised.

L: I see her in the shops. She’s got a kid. Then on Saturday afternoons you’d have either Shaggin’ Wagon or The Spurs…
S: Something with broad appeal.

L: yeah, and then on a Sunday night you’d have the Christians with Aunt Jennifer’s Tigers or, you know what I mean, but that was still full-house…

S: Yeah they were big nights…


Opening the Sandringham to various scenes she had identified in the area, “hardcore”, “punk” or “Christian” - Lenthal refers to them as - became a goal for her. By identifying the bands these people support and offering them gigs, the site can become more inclusive. Her description of the members of each of the groups as “black sheeps” (sic) shows her process of identity building and her personal identification with an oppositional culture she ascribes as universal at the site. Lenthal’s reference to one specific band member’s personal life, now over 10 years after the closing of the venue, highlights the close ties this process had on building personal and therefore community relationships, and also shows how personal relationships sit at the heart of community relationships. It is interesting to note how Lenthal says “youth” at one point, and changes this to “people” directly afterwards. Recent research in popular music illustrates how the notion of ‘youth’ is being questioned (Bennett, 2007), and with this change in descriptor Lenthal’s experience of the Sandringham’s demographic reflects the research findings. When does youth end? Bennett’s thoughts on the extending of what once were considered ‘youth’ activities into adult years is born out in the demographic make-up of Sandringham peoples.

Later in the interview Lenthal said,

…I was really interested in trying to attract everybody and getting other people that weren’t known to be at the Sando…(K. Lenthal, personal communication, July 17 and 23, 2007).

Lenthal saw her role as not only to support the community of music-making, but to build the community by identifying and inviting groups to play that were not ‘known’ at the place. One of the most enjoyable factors of working in, and visiting the Sandringham Hotel was the wide variety of music presented there. As mentioned in the Chapter Two, no ‘Sando sound’ could be identified from among the music
performed by the long list of bands that played at the venue. Although the people
interviewed expressed their enthusiasm for the community that centred itself on the
hotel, it was not a venue that promoted one genre of music. This sits at odds with
studies that have identified particular genres and mapped scenes within genre based
music cultures (Faris, 2004; Fonarow, 2006; Stratton, 2004; Straw, 2004). However,
scenes are rarely, if ever, reducible to one venue. Yet interviewees expressed the
view that a scene operated at the Sandringham, and this could be agreed if we accept
that “practices within a scene tie themselves to processes of historical change”
(Straw, 1991a: 469). What could be said about the culture was confirmed in a study
conducted well after the venue had disappeared. Discussing local sites that offered
live music-making events researchers found that, “(V)enue managers emphasised the
importance of such sites in constructing local community networks that cut across
professional, ethnic, geographical and class divisions in our society” (Johnson &
Homan, 2003: 39, 40). People in the community recognised the eclectic mix of
music, ideas and people that flowed through the place. Nadia Rangan remembers
this as a defining feature.

Smyly: What was it about the place? Do you think there was something unique about it?

Rangan: I think that it welcomed an eclectic group of people. It wasn’t just a uniform place
where people all dressed the same or voted the same. It certainly wasn’t one scene, it wasn’t
that at all and I like that about it. I liked that a lot and it also still had some of the old drunks
in there. It had a great street level feel that I missed. I mean Fitzroy used to have that but then
it was gentrified but the Sando, nothing gentrified there at all. Really, really streetish.

S: I suppose you could say that’s what actually did happen to it really.

R: Well, in the end, yeah they did gentrify it and now it’s a very different place. It’s still a
great little spot I think, what they’ve done with it. It’s nothing like the old place (N. Rangan,
personal communication, May 23, 2008).

The original bar was a few feet from the footpath, and several doors opened out onto
King Street, giving the place a “streetish” feel. Tim Freedman mentions this also (see
Chapter Four). This proximity to the outside makes a link to the street that is
immediate, allowing patrons to feel connected to the passing traffic, like they feel
connected to the bands by their proximity to the stage. Rangan draws comparison
with the Melbourne suburb of Fitzroy, home to live music venues like the Newry and
the Rainbow hotels. Fitzroy, and Melbourne live music pubs in general, have been subjected to the same ‘urban renewal’ pressures that have seen the closure of many venues in Sydney, and the process has been researched and documented well (Gibson & Homan, 2004). Rangan also moves into the present with “…and I like that about it”, when we are discussing a place from the past. The connection to the place and the community is still present for her, it seems. She views the place more as a node of multiple activity, not of one “uniform place”, and as connected to the street, and the lack of uniformity of any street in an urban place like Fitzroy or Newtown. Straw (1991b) discusses the multiplicity of activities within scenes, but these tend to be built around certain styles or genres of music. No one style dominated here, and not one type of person either, in Rangan’s view. This view is supported in an interview with Tim Holt of Sydney band The Camels who was asked to compare the Sydney and Melbourne rock scenes.

Rangan sees the cross-genre aesthetic operating in one venue, whereas Holt sees the musicians as not wedded to one playing of one style. Rangan is being interviewed about the Sandringham, not individual bands, so her answers are limited due to the circumstances of the questions, however Holt’s answer points to a condition of musicianship that may be Sydney wide, rather than just confined to the Sandringham.

Her feeling about the lack of a scene at the Sandringham is contrasted with other interviewees’ thoughts. Gen Maynard supposed that a scene could be said to exist at the place, but that being one of the people who frequented the site often, it was difficult to determine from such an embedded position.

Smyly: Did you think there was a scene in there? Did you ever get an impression from people that they felt it was…

Maynard: Only in as much as I said before, I think it was inner west identified to a certain point and there were definitely regulars and you could definitely, if you just dropped in there after work, like which I did frequently and just drop in there after work, you knew that you
were going to see someone there that you knew so in that respect there was a scene there. I don’t know because I was in that scene I guess, I don’t know if it was an exclusionist scene if you weren’t in the scene, I don’t know if you felt less welcome. That would be kind of hard for me to say (G. Maynard, personal communication, Oct 2, 2008).

Scene for her, in relation to the Sandringham is a spatially defined concept, not musically defined. Previously in our interview Maynard had referred to the plethora of musicians that inhabited the site. Musicians socialised and worked as bar staff there, creating for her a place where she, as a musician, could identify with others frequenting the site. Another musician, Dave Aston, recalls ‘Sandocentric’ people, and aligns these with people that attended the Shout Brother’s residency on Sunday nights.

Aston: I felt...ahh, outside of what I saw as the busiest and most Sandocentric people, like I never went and saw The Shout Brothers, for example.

Smyly: Right, so you felt there was a scene there?

A: I felt a little on the outside of a group of the people that I thought were ten years older than me, which seems ridiculous now but for sure because I knew that it was packed. Like, I didn’t know the Hayes boys, I didn’t know The Gadflies people that well or anything like that but I knew Floyd Vincent. I got to chat to Floyd. I met Louis Burdett there. That was the first conversation I probably had other than meeting Kostic but talking to Louis, Louis Tillett, Bill Jacoby, all those guys. But in terms of the … I didn’t feel so much part of the community that was living there but I felt part of one of the sort of musical communities.

S: Right, the music, yeah.

A: Yeah, I did live in Newtown the first time I moved out of home, so a couple of months after I’d first been to The Sandringham, so I did live there for a while but I never felt part of that kind of actual community, the people that lived there (D. Aston, personal communication, Oct 23, 2007).

Aston’s experience of living in Newtown was not an experience of feeling part of the Newtown community. He identified with the “musical” community of the Sandringham, rather than the broader Newtown community. As with Gen Maynard, his role as a musician is reflected in the other musicians that collected there. Aston positions himself outside of the “Sandocentric” people, particularly through his perception of a difference in age with others at the place. There is some ambiguity in
whether he is referring to people who live in Newtown, or people who live at the hotel. In my experience, a daily visit was not uncommon, and it was not uncommon to see either one or more of the Hayes brothers, or one of the other musicians, or members of bands he mentions, drinking at the bar. Some of the regular patrons lived there. Louis Tillett lived upstairs for a time in the early 1990s, as did Stevie Plunder (Anthony Hayes). Aston’s mention of talking with many of the well-known musicians that frequented the site confirms the place as a node of various forms of musical activity, a place where a community of artists met and socialised, as well as performed.

It is interesting to consider the range of musicians he mentions. Stylistically, Peter Kostic, drummer with Front End Loader, Regurgitator and the Hard Ons, all hard-rock acts (to generalise) sits well away from Louis Burdett, early drummer for the Whitlams, jazz groups like Nude, and known as an experimental noise artist. Louis Tillett is known for his work with Wet Taxis, Paris Green and many other solo and collaborative record releases. For Aston the community he felt part of was a “musical” one, and Gen Maynard’s view confirms this about the place. Mark Hyland felt there was a scene operating there, but like Maynard, being involved precluded him from seeing it.

Smyly: Do you think it had a reputation, do you think there was a scene there or did you have the sense that there was?

Hyland: I never did at the time but I found out later on that people thought it was very cliquey. You had to know people to get gigs there and probably the reason why I never knew that is because I was in the middle of it and I never ever noticed that. We’d play with bands and if the Sando came up half the bands would hate the place.

S: Because they couldn’t get a gig.

H: They couldn’t get a gig there and it was too cliquey and all that (M. Hyland and H. Ree, personal communication, Aug 28, 2008).

Hyland finds that his interaction with others not so closely aligned with the venue brings the issue into relief. Seen from outside, the Sandringham is a scene with strong boundaries and these are difficult to cross. Considering the disappearance of live music venues in inner Sydney at the time, (Johnson & Homan, 2003) it is not
hard to imagine conflicts arising with regard to access to live playing opportunities. People expressed positive feelings about the place if they had been accepted to play gigs there, but negatively if not. Access to the scene had a polarising effect on the broader music-making community, creating divisions between ‘Sando bands’ and others. I did not, and still do not, see the bands associated with the place as having stylistic uniformity, although some interviewees question this finding. What is evident in these contrasting views is the process (or series of processes) of identification with the idea of community operating there, and how there are plural and dynamic experiences of identification with the scene, not one universally identifiable community.

**Diversity in Style**

There are many styles of ‘rock’ in popular music, and perhaps like Hyland and Maynard suggest, my closeness to the venue blinded me to a lack of nuance in the styles of bands that performed there. It was, however, my proximity to the formation and subsequent development of many rock acts associated with the venue that provided the opportunity for my analytical listening skills to develop, offering clear identification of the different sub-genres and sub-styles on display. Even for the semi-engaged listener the aural experience of the metronomic precision of Front End Loader at full volume is very different from the rollicking swing of the early Whitlams. Some interviewees did see a collective principal unifying the bands that regularly played there. It was principally a ‘rock’ venue, in John Encarnacao’s view, as he explains.

Encarnacao: But the other thing I'd like to say that's maybe related to playing conditions is that in the mid-90s I was doing quite a bit of avant garde stuff as well and I was able to play there (the Sandringham) with my band Scuffy and I actually put on an all day event once on a Sunday of all avant garde stuff which I called the day the 'Krusty Klub' and had about eight or ten acts over a whole afternoon.

Smyly: Wow!

E: And you know, the Sando is a very rock kind of pub but on the other hand it was willing to give support to something like that which I thought was really...
S: Who did you organise that through?

E: I imagine it was Kirsty.

S: Yeah and so she had an attitude of having those non-rock...

E: I think a little bit.

S: Was it successful?

E: It was relatively successful, like it wasn't a packed house but there was a fair bit of traffic. It didn't send everyone out in droves.

S: Did you ever see things there that sent people out?

E: Well, one of my favourite stories, there was Scuffy. Did you ever see Scuffy?

S: I saw Scuffy, yep.

E: Scuffy was a band...

S: Duo.

E: Yeah, that a lot of people just couldn't stand it and I can understand why. Just playing with drum machine and keyboard bass at the Sando already felt like an act of heresy, not to mention Meredith's sort of banshee wail was quite confronting. I'll never forget we played at a show, it was my favourite heckle of all time, we played a show and it was on a public holiday Monday so we were playing at maybe five in the afternoon and there were a fair few people in the house and we played this particular song I remember called *Tranquilliser* which just ends with this barrage of drum machine and bass guitar riff and Meredith just screaming her head off and when it ended you could have heard a pin drop, it was just complete silence and one lone punter yelled out "play something original, play an original" (laughs). It was hilarious. I thought it was fantastic (J. Encarnacao, personal communication, May 27, 2008).

Encarnacao, unique among the interviewees, approaches popular music as an academic, as well as composing and performing in a variety of styles. His view of the Sandringham as a “very rock kind of pub” can be accepted as a considered view, one not given lightly. He lectures in performance at the university from which this thesis comes, and we play music together on a regular basis. My disagreement with his view of the pub being a venue promoting one style of music needs to be discussed. Positioning myself as an ‘insider’ in relation to this research brings with it
conflicts, and a need for close reflection, particularly when the subject of the research is a place I was fond of. Calls for greater reflexivity on the part of researchers in this position have been well noted (Bennett, 2002). Hodkinson (2005) discusses issues around ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ nomenclature, suggesting that recent post-subcultural moves to dismiss these designators are relevant. I agree with his argument, and would go further, proposing that my degree of ‘insiderness’ is movable throughout the different parts of this study. At some points interviewees talk of people and bands I never met or heard. Here, it must be said, analysing Encarnacao’s interview, my ‘insiderness’ is at its highest level. However, I can agree that,

*A situation or friend can be both strange and familiar concurrently or at different times and in different contexts, and one can alter perspective, engaging with and distancing oneself from relationships and activities around one* (Cohen, 1993: 125).

It is also important to contextualise Encarnacao’s view on his own position within the scene, as this effects how his description of the events above could be analysed.

Encarnacao: … my perception of the Sando and this may be incorrect is that it was only maybe around 1990 that they started to have better known bands playing there, but it was always a kind of a very local music scene, kind of establishment. I mean I always thought I was into quite indie kind of stuff, but for one reason maybe a lot of bands that played there were still not on my radar or maybe I just knew the Annandale and the Hopetoun and the Trade Union Club and various other venues better and I just tended to go there instead. I don't know what it was. I think the whole drinking culture of the Sando is something that I was never a part of, in a way that's sort of set me ... I just wonder if that's why I didn't really encounter the Sando before that because I wasn't part of a Newtown scene, I wasn't part of a drinking culture.

Smyly: So you felt those two things went together; that the Newtown scene was alcohol based in some way.

E: I don't know if I thought about it that way then, it's more that looking back I realise that's one reason why … yeah, I guess I feel a little on the outer from that sort of thing and it's because I'm not a heavy drinker, I'm not a daily drinker of beer so in a sense it's possible for me to think … what was I going to say … that I felt there was something kind of cliqu
about the Sando, that I wasn't part of the clique. And when I started playing residencies there with Shaggin Wagon I was sort of accepted into the clique (J. Encarnacao, personal communication, May 27, 2008).

As a non-daily drinker, Encarnacao saw himself as ‘outside’, or not accepted in a perceived clique evident at the hotel. This is despite him having been a musician in several ongoing groups that had played at other venues that offered similar types of bands. These venues included, at the time, the Annandale, the Hopetoun and the Lansdowne Hotels. As a performer, however, Lenthal, the entertainment booker, offered him a full day to program avant-garde, or experimental musics and I have confirmed with Encarnacao that the ‘Krusty Klub’ day was organised after Shaggin’ Wagon, another of his bands, began filling the venue regularly. So, open as Lenthal was to include a diverse range of music, including a day of what could be considered extreme music (and reading Encarnacao’s description above ‘extreme’ seems reasonable), there were barriers that needed to be crossed before the stage was made available for experimental music. Once Encarnacao had shown his (or his band Shaggin’ Wagon’s) ability to fill the venue, he becomes an accepted part of the scene, in his view, and Lenthal feels more confident to offer him space for a more experimental form of music to be included in the variety of entertainment offered at the site. Chris McBurnie confirms Encarnacao’s thoughts about the drinking culture of the place.

Smyly: Do you think alcohol consumption was an essential part of that culture.

McBurnie: Well it was definitely a part of it, an important part. I mean it was a pub so, you know, it needed people to drink the alcohol and supposed to keep the music free. When you’re offering free music like they did you wanted a fair drinking crowd and they were lucky that they had it (C. McBurnie, personal communication, Oct 2, 2008).

I’ll discuss the culture of intoxication that was prevalent at the place in another section, but Encarnacao felt the underlying culture of drinking, and by this, through my personal experience of the place, he means drinking to excess, formed a barrier to his entry to acceptance within the scene. This was not the case for him at the other inner Sydney venues he mentions, but was seen as a particular cultural marker of the scene at the Sandringham. The dominance of the central bar over the space in the room could have been central to building this culture, as I discuss in the chapter on
the stage. Other non-drinking interviewees (Dave Aston and Craig New) do not mention the drinking culture as a barrier to their acceptance in the community, but Aston’s avoidance of the Sunday Shout Brother’s residency, a ritual of heavy drinking and shouting requests to the band, could be seen as confirmation of Encarnacao’s experience. Despite this Encarnacao felt that, even though he had played at many other inner Sydney venues, there was a unique sense of community present at the Sandringham, and after some time he felt welcomed by it. Because the venue was a seven-nights-a-week music-making place I asked interviewees if they visited the hotel when there were no bands playing to see if the culture situated there was in any way independent of the music-making.

Encarnacao: "Did you ever go to the pub to socialise where music wasn't the thing?" No, but there would have been times when there was a band I was half interested in and I'd go down because I'd be pretty confident there'd be other people I could chat to. So, I wouldn't go down there if there was a band I didn't want to see or a band I had no interest in at all, but after I got to know the place and the people who hung out there, I probably went down there more often than I would another venue because there was a community there I was a part of.

Smyly: Did you meet musicians there that you collaborated with since?

E: Well Bernie Hayes. I never really knew Bernie. I mean I knew of the Shouties, Shout Brothers and I'd seen them once or twice but I wasn't a religious fan of the Shout Brothers and I really met Bernie because he used to mix our sound, used to mix Shaggin Wagon's sound and Pete and Bill (Kelly and Gibson; the other Shaggin’ Wagon members) were part time Shouties. Whenever Pat and Velzen were off on tour with the Falling Joys or if either of them were away without the other for some reason, Bill or Pete would fill in. So they were part of that Sando scene much earlier than what I was and they knew Bernie much better than I did (J. Encarnacao, personal communication, May 27, 2008).

Further to his initial thoughts about the culture of the place, Encarnacao came to identify closely with the community there. After he confirmed his place in the community, I ask him about collaborations that may have been facilitated by his involvement with the music-making culture of the place. An important point needs to be made about my follow-on question here. By my question it is clear I assume his community is a community of musicians. I first met Encarnacao at the Sandringham, although I had first seen him play at the Hopetoun hotel in 1986. The close association I hold of him (and myself) as a musician operating in an inner Sydney
scene precludes me from asking a more open question about which people make up
the community he felt part of. My assumption limits the research here, or could be
said to guide the outcome towards preconceptions I hold about the interviewee. Even
so, it is interesting to see how Encarnacao confirms his view of an operational
“Sando scene”, and then links the level of embeddedness in this scene to friendship
with Bernie Hayes. Friendship with Hayes, who played there twice a week, could be
viewed as predating entry to a deeper immersion in the community through this
reading of his narrative.

Music as Community Connection

Music-making played a significant role in drawing together the elements that went to
form the sense of community the interviewees referred to. Many musicians found
work behind the bar and this supported their music-making work, keeping them
immersed in the venue and in contact with the many other musicians that socialised
there. It was Warren Spooner’s decision to start having bands play at the hotel, and
he explained his personal reasons for choosing to open the site as a live music venue.

Spooner: I’ve always loved music. I have been around music and musicians since my uni
days, well I had been. The guys from the original line up of Galapagos Duck were all mates.
A mate of mine and I used to spend a lot of time at the Basement and other venues in the
city, with Joe Camilleri and all those boys were in their very early days of playing. So I had
this real love of music and when we bought the Sandringham you know it was just a typical
suburban pub. It was full of old people who worked or didn’t work and then came to the pub
and treated it like their lounge room, got drunk, went home and at eight o’clock it was a
desert and I found that to be incredibly boring and it certainly wasn’t the lifestyle that I
wanted and I didn’t want to be filling up guys with booze who should be at home with their
families. So that’s how it came about I guess. And for me introducing music was the logical
thing to do (W. Spooner, personal communication, June 25, 2008).

An important aspect of this process was the selection of bands to play. Venues like
the Basement had a long established clientele, and its city central location meant that
much of its patronage came from city employed wage earners. The Sandringham was
at the poor end of a poor suburb (in 1980), and this meant Spooner had to book bands
that catered for the clientele he wanted to attract, or that he knew were in the area.
Spooner, having an understanding of the demographics of the area, had a clear idea about what sort of bands would attract what sort of audience.

Spooner: ....but blues wasn’t something that worked really well at the Sando.

Smyly: Do you think that was because of the...

S: It was the clientele.

Sm: University.

S: Yeah, the kids that generally came to the Sando wanted to see something that was different. ......(quote included earlier)

Sm: Great.

S: It was good fun. And Bernie and the boys from Canberra had a couple of great bands. There was the Gadflys and Secret Seven. They were good fun and they brought a really nice crowd with them. The pub was always full but everybody had big smiles on their faces. That was fun too (W. Spooner, personal communication, June 25, 2008).

Being a suburb adjacent Sydney University, the Newtown area was known at the time for its cheaper rents, affordable to students and the local arts scene. Gentrification in Paddington (Homan, 2000: 41) had moved many local musicians to look for accommodation firstly in Surry Hills, and following its demographic changes, in Newtown. The blues and jazz bands Spooner had known catered for an older audience and he was willing to open the venue to more innovative performers in order to attract the available live music going public. The bands he hired would sometimes furnish the space with their own lounges and chairs remaking the space as a home place, a place familiar and welcoming. The earlier discussion concerning the use of the space as a lounge room finds resonance here. Spooner’s part in the creation of a community atmosphere in this case was to move away from a more controlling attitude, and to let the place be changed by the enthusiastic participants, signalling to the patrons and band that the space was equally theirs. These early experiences set an ethos that was sustained after his departure it seems, although as Bernie Hayes remembered of these early band years, aspects of control in the space were problematic.
Smyly: What did you think of The Sando when you first walked in? Did you make any judgements? Can you remember what you thought about it?

Hayes: It was good, there were all the Croatian boys and they kind of ran the pub, it was a rough pub, really quite tough, pretty unfinished area, and from The Sando down nearly half the shops were vacant. It had passed its use by date and was yet to be revitalised. So lots of rough heads came in. Warren had his little group of Croatian boys who played pool and sold dope and that kind of went on, he didn’t have to know about it but he knew and they were his bouncers.

S: Right, so if anyone got into trouble.

H: Yep, he had that little crew there. George and Marcel and there were a few others there, Phil and all of them the loveliest people when you’re on their side. Most of them have since been through prison and come out occasionally. I’ve run into them every now and then.

S: Wow, still around the area?

H: Yeah, well I’ve seen George particularly a few times but Phil went on to be a postie.

S: So when you mean selling dope, they’re selling marijuana?

H: Yeah, I think that’s the full extent of what they were doing, play pool and deal from the back of the pub all day (B. Hayes and J. Richardson, personal communication, Aug 16, 2007).

I will address the use and abuse of drugs (including alcohol) at another time, but the pattern of allowing (or encouraging) patrons to participate in the running of the venue was set early in Spooner’s ownership, according to Hayes’ recollection. This led to a greater sense of ownership of the place, particularly by the local men operating as de-facto security guards and conducting their business from the site. To have security issues dealt with by local people reinforced the sense of a local place conveyed either to those from the area who could have recognised the ‘bouncers’ personally, or to those visiting that experienced their authority. There is a longer discussion of the prevalence of violence at the site in another chapter. I asked Spooner whether he knew of drugs or drug dealing at the site, wanting to confirm Hayes’ narrative.
Spooner: Oh yeah. The only times that I have come close to physical danger was over drugs because … see I’d been a health educational lecturer, it was a weird enough situation that I was running a pub but everybody knew drugs was a ‘no no’. I’m not naïve enough to suggest that it didn’t happen but they all knew that if I caught somebody dealing they didn’t get thrown out, I hung onto those guys and I rung the cops. That was how it was going to work and as a result I’ve had a number of near misses coming out of the garage, late at night at the back and I’ve had three or four knives pulled on me in the pub and on one occasion a rifle from guys who were wanting to distribute there and finding it frustrating.

B: Right. Heroin?

S: Mostly the softer end, speed, pot. Not too much heroin. There were a couple of guys that I knew were using but you always hope they’re getting it from somewhere else. I never actually saw them do a deal. They’re pretty sneaky characters (W. Spooner, personal communication, June 25, 2008).

His answer does not confirm Hayes’ recollection, but he does not deny it either. The reference to “they” in the last sentence seemed specific, as though particular people were remembered, but this is my interpretation. Others remembered Spooner having strict control over the place. Steph Miller recalled his lack of tolerance for unruly behaviour.

Miller: Warren had a … what do you call it? … the pacifier behind the bar, I think it was a baseball bat or something like that and he was a big bloke and pretty scary. You know, I just remember seeing him many times where he just got, if a hassle happened anywhere in the pub, he’d just have this stare and give this icy stare at these people and it was like “oh, oh, okay”. So he had a bit of command over the place; it was good (S. Miller, personal communication, Nov 7, 2007).

It is interesting to note how, with the venue being small, Spooner was able to survey the scene and communicate his displeasure to people who, in larger, more anonymous crowds could become violent. By doing this he could communicate his ownership of the place, and offer as he intended, a safe place to see live music. Performance of live music remained the common feature of the community building that took place at the site. I asked Bernie Hayes, the venue’s most regular performer, if he was still in contact with people he had met from his time at the Sandringham.
Hayes: Yes, probably most of the people I know in Sydney are Sando people and surprisingly, as much as I never did with school friends, have kept in touch with most of them even though … I guess I had nothing in common with school people but most of the people you met at The Sando all had that musical connection and lots of them are still playing music so it makes sense that we’d come across each other. But there is that, I hope it’s not just me who feels it but this terrible sense of fraternity and because I guess each week, whenever I get an old Sando person along I look forward to that Wednesday¹, I feel so relaxed about it. I think “this is going to be a breeze”.

Smyly: Where do you think that’s from? Is it the way they approached their music? Was there something about the way the music ran at The Sando that made these people not so uptight?

H: I’ve never thought about it but I guess it attracted like minded people.

S: Yeah.

H: It’s like any place, if you don’t feel you fit in you’re not going to keep going back and eventually I’m sure The Sando was filled up with very similar characters musically and socially.

S: Yeah, although the music was quite diverse.

H: Yeah but quite often inventive, but certainly I don’t know where The Shouties fit into that equation because we were a rock ‘n’ roll cover band, but I guess it was off the planet occasionally yeah. Off the planet is probably the ruling gauge (B. Hayes and J. Richardson, personal communication, Aug 16, 2007).

Hayes sees a “musical connection” as the glue that bound the people together at the site. He goes as far as calling his collected friends “Sando people”, confirming Aston and Encarnacao’s thoughts about people they identified as indivisible from the site. The music-makers and music lovers he met there are easy going, and “like minded”, and he sees this as a logical outcome of many years of engagement with the place. This sits against the views of Nadia Rangan who earlier expressed her liking for the diversity of people flowing through the place. When asked to consider a defining factor or a commonality among the many bands and performers he had known at the place, Hayes finds this hard to pinpoint. He reaches for “off the planet”, somewhere not like anywhere else, rather than somewhere similar. To him, there were no similar places, just similarly minded people, but the quality of their similarity is
indescribable. Evident is the way the place is made by the people and defined, in his memory, by the people.

Lena Minutillo follows a similar narrative when asked about places that were, to her, like the Sandringham.

Smyly: Is there anywhere else you found that comes close? You mentioned The Hopetoun comes close to replicating the same sort of feel.

Minutillo: Anywhere else?

S: Yeah.

M: Not for that particular scene, you know. I spent time in nightclubs that had their own sort of version of that but it wasn’t a live music thing. It was sort a nightclub version of it so, no and not with that sense of community or the interrelationships between people. That with the workers alone was kind of like a largish group and then there were customers who there were many of who were regular so they were like that extension of that and then there were musicians and it was a real kind of combination of all these people coming together (L. Minutillo, personal communication, Aug 9, 2007).

The live music offered at the site played a particular role in bringing different groups of people together. Minutillo’s nightclub work was different somehow, no musicians, no regular patrons who spent days reading the paper and playing pool, conversing and interacting. She identifies three of the four groups I identified, bar staff, musicians and patrons, and the interrelationships form this sense of community for her. Minutillo goes further, to describe how new bands could get a gig at the venue. As mentioned earlier, much has been written about the closure of live music venues in Sydney at that time (Johnson & Homan, 2003). With venue managers struggling with various negotiations of laws covering safety regulations, noise restrictions, and responsible serving of alcohol provisions, combined with the lure of easier profits from poker machines ever present, to give gigs to unknown and mostly unheard rock bands was a rare thing in inner Sydney. The Sandringham supplied the community of aspiring rock players with a rare opportunity to play before an audience. However, as Minutillo explained, the hardest audience to please, and the people who had a direct say in whether the bands could be booked to play again, were the bar staff.
Minutillo: I think to me what it was and I pegged it early, it was just a place where any band could almost get a show, you know? So it was like a breeding ground for anyone to have a go. They had to submit a CD or something first obviously and if they were half okay, Kirsty would say yes and then they’d get a go and that was really, I think, part of the whole ethic of that place with the music side of it.

S: So it was open to whatever.

M: Yeah, exactly. Well, it was selected, obviously Kirsty did make selections and I guess she chose for our genre and from her tastes and the scene and the culture at the time, drew from all of that but having said that, you saw a lot of crappy bands.

S: I asked Kirsty if she could remember any of the crappy bands and she said…

M: She didn’t work.

S: She said she’d blocked them out of her memory.

M: She didn’t work for a lot of them because she was the day office chick with the little glasses and there came a point where she kind of didn’t hang out there too much at night except for special shows that she wanted to be there for. It was the workers mate! And the next day she’d cop it. “That band was fuckin’ shit.”

S: “Never book them in again.”


Much as this collective appraisal and intervention by bar staff could be seen to “function as both a scheme of interpretation and as a scheme of orientation for each member” (Webb, 2004: 82) of the scene, or a ‘staff as style police policy’, the wide variety of genres presented at the venue speaks to the broad tastes of the people employed there. The fact that “half the bar staff were musicians” (Blunt, 2001: 253) as Pat Hayes noted, meant that these appraisals were not made from ignorance, but with a lived understanding of what constituted a good band, or good music. Contradictorily, if the place was typified by the multiplicity of musical tastes encouraged, it is not surprising to hear interviewees Mark Hyland and Harry Ree disagree on the centrality of music to the Sandringham’s community glue. Although the music was important to Hyland, he takes issue with Ree, stating his reasons for choosing to visit the pub night after night.
Ree: Look, it’s like my old flat mate Claire Mortimer. When I moved out of Rawson Street behind the Sando and moved to the share place up in North Newtown and Claire, my flatmate, would always go to me “how can you go to the Sando every night, I mean how can you go every night?” and I didn’t even answer, what do you do so I took her down, I must have been a Shouties or a Gruesome man, took her down once and she was hooked. It was the bands, it was the music.

Hyland: No, I disagree with that.

Ree: I reckon it was.

Hyland: I was bagged also by Pete from Disney Fist “why do you go and see the Shouties all the time, they play all the same songs every week”. It was about seeing the people that are going all the time. You’d sit around talking shit. The Gruesomes would play every … 95% of the songs you heard them play before and you’ll hear them play the same thing with the Shouties and the Gruesomes, Shaggin’ Wagon same thing, you hear all those same songs.

Ree: Yeah.

Hyland: But it was more about the people you were going and sitting down with them talking shit (M. Hyland and H. Ree, personal communication, Aug 28, 2008).

Hyland affirms two important points here. Firstly, the attraction of being together with a community of regular patrons, rather than the live music events themselves, was important to how the site operated. Secondly, the ritual of live performance events, constructed of “95%” repetition, engendered a sense of ownership and belonging to place in the minds of these regular patrons. Confirming Hyland’s view was Chris McBurnie who also found the people to be the drawcard. Having his work place, Troy Horse Studios, almost directly across the road meant he visited the hotel often.

McBurnie: It’s not just only the band that you saw there it was just like the crowd and depending who was there and whatever. I mean, you never had a bad time when you went to the Sando (C. McBurnie, personal communication, Oct 2, 2008).

Even though the participants in this study expressed their feelings of closeness to the people from the place, issues of community conflict were also apparent and discussed during the interview collection process.
Community and Gentrification

Lenthal refers to the socio-economic change she saw taking place at the site. At a time in the 1980s, as Pat Hayes told Bob Blunt,

The shops were boarded, rent was cheap and people were a lot poorer. It was only later that fear moved south down King Street. (Blunt, 2001: 253)

Kirsty Lenthal’s perception was that, although Newtown was originally a working class area, people from more wealthy suburbs had begun frequenting the pub in the year or two before the 1998 closure.

Lenthal: Yeah, yeah…I think you know, I didn’t like it when, in the later stages where it became full of people that shouldn’t have been there, but they all had money to drink.

Smyly: Right. You’re talking about the change in Newtown from being a student dormitory to being a real estate prospect.

L: uhuh, uhuh….exactly. I can remember when Julie (name changed) bought her house and she was the first person that I’d known personally to buy a house…(K. Lenthal, personal communication, July 17 and 23, 2007).

The increase in wealthier clientele comes with her experience of a friend (and regular hotel patron) purchasing a house in the area. Her experience of increased wealth in the area is confirmed by her recognition of local people entering the housing market. Conflict is evident in her expressing dislike for new, wealthier clients, but as licensee and manager she understands the benefits to the venue when people spend more money on alcohol. This attitude is at odds with her view, expressed earlier in this chapter, of making links with the broader Newtown community. Her identification with an inclusive community is changeable, pointing towards a fluid process of identity building.

As Chris McBurnie said, the music-making space was supported by the sale of alcohol (and partly by door charges on certain nights). The markers of new, wealthier patrons visiting the pub more regularly, coupled with the first of her friends being in the financial position to buy a house indicate a shift in the economic climate in
Newtown in general. The impacts of that change on live music in the suburb have been studied recently (Gibson & Homan, 2004). One of the issues for Lenthal in her role as entertainment booker was in keeping ‘old’, or existing, patrons interested while opening the venue to more contemporary sounds. Lenthal remembers this juggling act with pride.

Lenthal: Yeah, umm, I always prided myself on being able to respect the old, and keep the good of the old, and bring in the new, and bring in the best of the new. You know, try and keep those two worlds happy. It’s about keeping everybody happy in the community. You know Lena also said it was like a little community.

Smyly: Yeah.

L: It was a community.

S: I remember some charity gigs that were put on for different people. Lena had a friend…

L: Lena had a friend Teresa who had a disorder called Friedrich’s Ataxia…

S: Right.

L: You know, she’s now…there was a book written about her and there’s a whole, you know, she’s quite well known now. She’s a painter in New York. Her disease is crippling her more and more…..

S: …..and you ran a night for her I remember. I think I played at it (K. Lenthal, personal communication, July 17 and 23, 2007).

Lenthal moves from remembering the place as “like a little community”, confirming the idea with the support of a recent conversation with a friend (and fellow worker from the site), to “(i)t was a community”, more firmly stating her perception of the closeness of the human relationships she experienced at the place. The closeness of the personal relationships also makes her keenly aware of the appearance of new patrons and the financial differences between her ‘community’ and those being attracted to the place in the later years. Her memories of a community organised charity event makes this feeling of identification with the people around her stronger, it seems, and she updates the personal details of the charity recipient’s condition, again bring into the present events from the past. The feeling of community remains
even though she can see the signs of a change in economic demographic in the area, and the perceived income levels of people visiting the hotel increases.

Another view of gentrification can be seen at play in the community organization of other events. Much as the Sandringham was the site of ritual activity mostly centred on music-making, at times the people of the place would join in sporting events held away from the hotel. Their enjoyment of socialising with the people in the community led Hyland and Ree (along with ‘Stebbo’) to organise a golf day that ran yearly.

Ree: It ran for six, seven, eight, nine – for years. There was another mate Stebbo, it was his idea to do it.

Smyly: How many people would you get out of the pub of non-golf players?

Ree: The first year was certainly pretty big.

Hyland: First year I think was about 50 players and the last year there was 11 but in the last year, it was ’99, so not many people were going there, it wasn’t even called the Sando Cup.

R: We’re quite big sport footy heads these days but back then I guess we were all trying to be cool and not be footy head/sport heads and golf is one thing, you know in the early 90s when we all got into golf, everyone was down at Marrickville Golf Course. A few of us would be on the dole or whatever and I do remember the inaugural Sando Cup was ’96 I think.

H: Yeah it was ’96.

R: And I remember the week before it was scheduled to play I remember I … I think I went down with you (Smyly)… I was thinking it would be good to get a practice round in the week before and I went down and fuck, everyone was there. They were all there practicing for the week after.

H: And the Daisy Grinders boys…

R: Yeah, everyone was a closet golfer and guys like Tim, magnificent players, Tim, Damien Oxley is a great player, you know.

H: It was a Tom Petty thing. It was uncool to talk about it and we realised we were all Springsteen fans and people who played golf years ago, they hadn’t talked about it.

R: When as soon as this golf tournament was organised it was, yes, yes.
Smyly: I played every week with Moriarty and Bernie.

R: There you go, yeah. Bernie’s still fanatical.

H: One of my funniest rounds was Bernie’s bucks day when I played with you and Moriarty. No it was you, Andy Travers, Bernie and me and then Moriarty’s turned up halfway through and that was the funniest game of golf I ever had.

R: I remember Moriarty flew up, it might have been the second or third comp they flew up from Melbourne because they were touring Melbourne. They flew up and flew back down again (M. Hyland and H. Ree, personal communication, Aug 28, 2008).

Even though the event was centred on sport, the sport chosen to unify the community is one not usually associated with pub rock culture. Golf is seen in their minds as a more gentrified game when compared with “footy” (rugby league). However, the people are identified by band names and the music-making within the community becomes central to the identities of those involved, in the minds of Hyland and Ree. Hyland had mention previously his surprise that an appreciation of Tom Petty and Bruce Springsteen was not frowned upon when he first started to visit the Sandringham. This was at odds with attitudes he had encountered at other inner Sydney venues, highlighting the open attitudes to various genres and styles of popular music-making that typified the culture prevalent at site.

As an exercise in surveying the broad mix of practicing musicians who frequented the site, and who were involved in off-site activities, I will outline the bands relationships of the people mentioned in Hyland’s narrative. Tim and Damien Oxley, mentioned by Hyland, are brothers to Peter and Jeremy, members of The Sunnyboys, and Melanie, singer with The Sparklers and her own duo with Chris Abrahams. Tim played in the Verys and other groups, while Damien toured as lighting operator for bands like You Am I and The Cruel Sea. The Oxley family were regular patrons and performers at the venue. Bernie Hayes is mentioned, as are the Moriarty brothers, Phil and Mick of The Gadflys. Also mentioned is Andy Travers who played (with me) in The Andy 500, Golden Guitar winning band The Happening Thang, and Lock, Stock and Darryl with Hayes. All these groups played the Sandringham regularly. The Gadflys played regularly at the venue as well, from as early as 1983 up until its 1998 closure, and their close connection to the site is highlighted by their willingness to fly from Melbourne to participate in a Sandringham community event.
Hyland had previously argued for the primacy of people over music as the main attractor, to paraphrase, but the people he talks of are mostly band members. This humanising of the collective band into individuals, and the close identification with individuals negates the collective band identifiers. This also could be seen as an effect of the proximity to the performers in the small sized venue.

The other point about Hyland and Ree’s recollections here is the lack of a teleological understanding in the remembrance of the events organised. If the event ran for eight or nine years, and began in 1996, this would mean the last golf day would have been in 2004. The last was in 1999, they both agree, so the recollection of the event is distanced from a specific time-line analysis for them, or the event was held more than annually. It must be said that the interview was conducted in a pub (The Golden Barley, Enmore), and that both interviewees were drinking alcohol. This is no impediment to good, or more importantly, honest narrative as has been found in studies involving other, more drug effected interviewees (Bourgois, 1995). I played in several Sando Cup competitions but cannot recall the dates. My interest is not in how many times these events took place. The fact that they were organised from within a community of music-makers centred on the Sandringham is illustrative of the how the community operated away from the site.

“The Sando was my Lounge Room”

Ruth Finnegan (1989) looks briefly at pubs in Milton Keynes. One hotel, the White Hart reveals a publican deeply involved with the community of music-making at that pub. “He followed the tradition” (pg 227) of pub owners organising charity events for local charities, and being a musician himself was keen to build a live music reputation for the venue by allowing the community to use the space. This role, as a hub of community involvement in live music-making and appreciation is close to the original intention Warren Spooner had for the Sandringham. Spooner had clear thoughts about how he would like the venue to be used, and even in the years after his leaving, from about 1992 onwards his original intentions for the place remained, kept alive by those who identified with those intentions.
Spooner wanted to offer a place where people could enjoy music in pleasant and safe surrounds.

Spooner: I had this vision that the Sando was my lounge room and that the people who came there were other people who enjoyed music like I did and this gave them the opportunity to see really creative people before they got so expensive that they had to think about whether they could see them.

Smyly: Okay.

S: And because it was my lounge room it had to be a safe place. And if I was going to spend from 8:30 in the morning until 2:00 or 2:30 the next morning every day, it had to be fun and really that was the only way I could look at it. I did have a constant battle that went on intellectually for me with the fact that in setting that up I was actually promoting a practice that my profession abhorred. (W. Spooner, personal communication, June 25, 2008).

The “practice” he refers to is the serving of alcohol, and his dilemma could be seen in light of the long training and employment he had had as a health educator. His specific mention of the term ‘lounge room’ is interesting because it was a term used by several interviewees. As he worked to change the old hotel into a music venue, he spent long hours at the place. Spooner’s natural inclination was to make his business experience enjoyable, and this translated into the creation of a space that would be “safe” for people to enjoy music in. The history of social conflict in and around live music venues in Sydney has been documented elsewhere (Homan, 2003b). The attitude of Spooner at the inception of this music-making place sits in contrast with the subsequent lax attitude of his (now ex-) partner Sandy, whose hands-off approach has been discussed earlier in this chapter. Both approaches had advantages and disadvantages, but it seems as though Warren’s intentions for the place became infused in the minds and actions of those who came to the venue, even after he had left.

Many interviewees confirmed that the Sandringham operated as a de facto lounge room, in effect becoming an extension of their home space. The sense of ‘ownership’ felt by many of the interviewees was enhanced by the way in which people felt they could inhabit the place as they would part of their home space.

Smyly: did you visit the pub at times when there weren’t bands on?
Hyland: Well, yeah. Saturday afternoons. I’d go and read the paper there because I don’t think I had a big enough space at home to put out a whole Saturday Herald so I’d go and sit at the bar.

S: Right, so you saw it as an extension of your home space?

H: Yeah, I’d joke about it being my lounge room, but it was for a long time. I wasn’t there every night of the week but I’d be there Tuesday nights, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday so I had two nights off (M. Hyland and H. Ree, personal communication, Aug 28, 2008).

Implicit in his use of the bar for newspaper reading is the understanding of the type, or more specifically the size of rental accommodation more generally available in Newtown at the time. The reference to the space becoming his “lounge” is interesting, especially since Hyland became a regular at about the same time Warren Spooner moved away from the site.

I asked Spooner about his reasons for making this small and not so well appointed hotel into a music venue. He enjoyed blues and 50s rock and roll bands, but being close to Sydney University, his attitude of offering gigs to young musicians encouraged greater involvement from bands in the area.

Spooner: Yeah, the kids that generally came to the Sando wanted to see something that was different. Some bands would come in there and bring all the furniture out of their lounge room and you’d have three or four lounges and side tables and lamps in the public bar and all the furniture that was normally in there has been stuck out the back because that was the atmosphere they wanted to create (W. Spooner, personal communication, June 25, 2008).

His intention, to make a public space operate in the minds of the patrons as a private space, saw bands furnish the room in a personal, and therefore more intentionally comfortable way. Spooner’s open attitude had a lasting effect on those that frequented the pub in the years after he had left.

Smyly: Could you describe the feel of the Sando? You said that it was quite a loud and anything goes sort of place.

Anonymous: Yeah, I think it was. It was quite chaotic really but not in a bad way, it was not a shambles, it was just you didn’t feel you had to modify your behaviour when you were there, you could talk as loud as you like and play as loud as you like. I think, a lot of things too, people tended to look out for each other there as well. You know, after years of being
there and if there was any trouble people would help you sort it out. Quite a few people lived out the back in that street, out the back of the Sando. I can remember quite a few street parties in the alley way out the back.

Smyly: Right.

Anon: But it was like an extension of the lounge room, across the alley way into the Sando and back again. And that’s when it was all sort of open, you could just sort of crash in the back door of the pub and back out. So it was quite a community really because a lot of people living in Station Street and then across the road in Station Street, there was about three houses full of about eight people in each one, it was quite a busy, busy space (Anonymous, personal communication, Oct 28, 2007).

Again, the interviewee offers his/her perception of the place as part of a domestic space, similar to the shared domestic spaces on the street parallel to King Street.

As a vast majority of Australian lounge rooms have television sets, and become places where television watching is a shared experience, Murray Rees recalls similar behaviour at the Sandringham.

Smyly: Did you socialise in the pub often when you weren’t working?

Rees: Yeah, yeah.

S: Every day?

R: Yeah, as you know six o’clock everything goes off, Simpsons go on, you watch The Simpsons, six thirty music goes back on, everyone starts talking again. Through about 1991 and 1993 that was it, Simpsons six o’clock, band stopped except for Saturdays when they were playing on Saturdays but the band stopped and that was it, band stopped, everyone watched The Simpsons, had a few fuckin’ beers, great fuckin’ laugh (M. Rees, personal communication, July 12, 2007).

The ritual aspects of the shared experience cannot be ignored here. As families group together to share ‘family’ oriented television shows, the patrons of the Sandringham shared 30 minutes of television watching each evening. Unlike the current prevalence of multiple large flat-screen televisions in hotel bars broadcasting non-stop football, horse and dog racing events, the Sandringham had one smallish unit perched atop the cupboard that housed the mixing desk. As Rees explains, it was only turned on once a day and turned off afterwards. The Simpson’s renowned
critique of western cultural hypocrisies found an appreciative audience, made up as it was of musicians and music lovers from an inner-city rock scene, or “black sheeps” (sic) (K. Lenthal, personal communication, July 17 and 23, 2007) as discussed earlier.

Earlier in the interview Rees gave his assessment of the hotel in general.

Rees: When I walked in that time, Hannah and I were absolutely fucking flabbergasted it was allowed to stay open. I’d never seen a more disgusting dirty pub in my life and it was just phenomenal. It was just shit. When I came back two months later or three months later after being in England and I hung out in the pub for a while … you wouldn’t go there for the pub itself, you went there for the people and went there for the bands and that was a phenomenal difference and it was one of the few pubs I’ve actually been to that there was a real camaraderie with people, you know like a real friendship with the locals and it was fuckin’ great, it really was good. It wasn’t your typical pub and never see a pub like it again I don’t think, but it was just a real bunch of local people who looked after the pub itself and looked after themselves and the bands. You had to look after Stevie a couple of times but yeah, it was nothing like a pub I’d ever been involved before hand or since. It was not a normal pub it was a fuckin’ time warp. It was unbelievable (M. Rees, personal communication, July 12, 2007).

Although the hotel was a well-known and well-regarded music venue in some circles, Rees makes a clear difference between the “pub itself” and the people who frequented the site. His regard for the “local people” is evident, and also his acknowledgement that the hotel was being run by the people who were using the venue, similar in operation to a community organization as Bernie Hayes suggested at the beginning of this chapter. The community looked after each other, and the bands, he says. So an inverse of the idea of entertainers satisfying audience members is clear. A “social drama” (Turner, 1987: 36) is being played out, replicated daily where the “consequence of shared understandings and experiences in the lives of members of the same sociocultural field” (ibid) are on display. Turner’s ‘liminality’ is evoked in Rees’ “time warp”, with the hotel entering a place where a more modern world of fleeting associations and shorter attention spans is held at bay outside. Turner’s non-belief in the continued cultural replication through the invocation of liminality through ritual seems to exist at this place, where an ethic of mutual support, music-makers for music appreciators and, as is implied by Rees’
“had to look after Stevie” comment, staff and appreciators looking after music-makers is at play.

Size and Space

All interviewees mentioned that the Sandringham Hotel was very small, and many mentioned this when asked about their first impressions of the place. One of the key findings of this study concerned the profound effect the architecture of the space had on the formation of ‘place’ in the minds of the people interviewed. By asking interviewees about their continuing friendships with people from the community there, I wanted to see if the experiences of community engagement they had at the site were still relevant in their lives today. Most interviewees formed significant relationships at the site during their time there, and these relationships are current and meaningful. Harry Ree intimated that it was the size and shape of the place that facilitated the formation of friendships.

Smyly: So did you make any friendships at the hotel that continue?

Ree: Fuck, all our friends. Mate, all our good friends are from that. No, well we’ve got new friends….Guys like the Bailes and D’Arni and all them they were sort of the other side…

Hyland: Other side of the bar….

Ree:… I remember for maybe a year or so I’d always see them there but they were on the other side of the bar. I guess we’d acknowledge each other but we weren’t mates but then all of a sudden we’ve become family sort of thing.

S: Someone mentioned it was like that because everyone was facing each other at the bar, you didn’t sort of disappear. You had to look at all the people in the face.

H: Yeah, because of the square … it was a cosy place (M. Hyland and H. Ree, personal communication, Aug 28, 2008).

Only after the hotel was remodelled, and the community that met there was dispersed did Ree and Hyland more formally meet people they recognised from the Sandringham. The feeling of community was therefore not based on close personal interactions with others at the site, in some cases. In this instance, the feelings could
be seen to be engendered by the site itself, rather than the interactions with others. The small size of the place meant that if you attended regularly, you were bound to see others that did the same. Acknowledgement of their regular attendance, a nod directed across to the other side of the square central bar was all that was needed to feel joined in that community. Ree and Hyland met the people from “the other side” (see Figure 4), and deepened their friendship when they separately decided to move their social site to The Golden Barley Hotel. This pub retains many of the original architectural features common to early twentieth-century built hotel in inner western Sydney, features similar to those admired by people that socialised at the Sandringham. Ree’s story of not knowing these people across the bar sits at odds with an idea of a community of people well known to each other.

Figure 4 - The view across the bar towards the King St. entry doors and the stage on the right. Bar staff on the last night pictured here are l-r. Bow Campbell, Kirsty Lenthal and Sam Carter.

The level of knowing in this case goes as far as “acknowledging”, but something in the acknowledgement has led to these people now becoming “family” for Ree. They can talk of their shared experience of the Sandringham, and can authenticate the shared experience because the place was small and you could ‘see’ all the people there. This is a new and more complex view of what ‘community’ meant to those who visited the Sandringham regularly.
Warren Spooner thinks that the size of the space was a prime factor in the way the place engendered strong community feelings. My question was about what possible futures he had in mind for the place and this was, in some way, driven by my feelings of loss for the vibrant music-making site it became. Most interviewees mentioned the loss of the unique ‘feel’ the hotel had after they had seen the renovated space.

Smyly: Did you have longer term plans for the Sando?

Spooner: I actually don’t think that I ever thought that through. You know, I was pretty young then and it was really my first commercial venture. Up until then I’d worked for the government and I don’t think that I really did have a long term plan. I guess if anything, the long term plan was to buy the freehold of the pub from the brewery and finally be able to do whatever I wanted with it and develop it however I wanted. But the problem would always have been the size. You know, the Sando struggled for the entire 10 years that I owned it from the fact that you could only physically fit so many people in it and I think that that was an advantage and a disadvantage. The advantage was that it had such a fantastic atmosphere and part of that atmosphere was that you were standing on the feet of the person next to you. You know, it was so close and everybody seemed to get on because of that. I think if it was a bigger room we’d have lost that sense of community but at the same time it was always therefore a struggle to make ends meet (W. Spooner, personal communication, June 25, 2008).

Although the size was an issue for Spooner economically, as a social space many agreed that the site was conducive to forming friendships. This same trade-off between economic and social forces was discussed earlier by Suzie Schlesinger. The sense of community Spooner talks of is not evident at the venue today. The band performances take place upstairs, while much of the space downstairs is dedicated to large television screens for viewing cable networks and for gambling purposes. Some live performances do take place just inside the doors to the street, but these are ‘acoustic’ ensembles, with strict limits on the performance ‘volume’. The bar is against one side wall, and is much higher than the previous serving counter. There is no encouragement to sit at the bar, whereas previously, sitting around the bar was the prime position for social interaction and uninterrupted views of the entertainment, and as Ree and Hyland point out, views of other patrons. Lisa Rowland recalled the
small size of the pub, and the intimacy with others this engendered as a prime factor in her building social relations with other people at the site.

Rowland: Yeah, that’s right and even if you weren’t sitting at the bar, you were sitting at the tables, they were all close and it was like you were all sitting together anyway. And you’d often fall into conversations with people you hadn’t met before because the people you were with had gone to the bar or the loo or whatever and then you just start chatting or whatever. That was such a great thing about it because you just end up getting to know everyone and particularly, once I moved from Oatley into this area you’d see people on the street and in the shops and whatever (P. Blatch and L. Rowland, personal communication, June 6, 2007).

Even away from the architecture of the bar that facilitated face-to-face interaction and the nods of acknowledgement, the size of the place lent itself to community conversation and interaction, Rowland says. The place then expanded from the specific site, out to the suburb after she had moved to live nearby, and the Sandringham begins to act as a doorway to deeper experience of immersion in the community.

Conflict within the Community

Nic Dalton recalls arriving back in Australia after having been in the United States and England playing with Evan Dando’s band, The Lemonheads. The band was experiencing international recognition with its Atlantic Records released LP *It’s a Shame About Ray* (Lemonheads, 1992). Although many interviewees talked of finding ‘like minded’ or long lasting friends at the venue, the site was also a place where conflicts could emerge and be played out. As researchers have found, “the rich detail of local music scenes and sounds cannot be divorced from wider economic contexts…” (Connell & Gibson, 2003), and although their discussion is more about production and distribution issues, in the following narrative Dalton recalls a personal conflict underscored by notions of local versus national/international recognition, and therefore access to lucrative work for musicians interacting within the Sandringham community. Similar narratives were to play out with other bands from the scene including the Whitlams, Frenzal Rhomb and Pollyanna.
Having been one of the early members of the Gadflys, Dalton’s engagement with the Sydney popular music scene has included organising and playing in many bands, and also founding and running an independent record label, Half A Cow. For many years Half A Cow offered a retail store on Glebe Point Road, so Dalton’s engagement with the local music scene is deep and continuous. A chance meeting with United States singer/songwriter Evan Dando saw Dalton play in the Lemonheads, a band with an international profile and gigging schedule. On his return to Sydney, Dalton felt as though people treated him differently, looking at, and talking about him rather than approaching him. For a place that at other times generated such communitas, the reaction to his international success was not what he had expected. He had the feeling that he was not as welcome in a place he had felt such camaraderie in before.

Dalton: …….. This is something I probably never would have told anybody but that same feeling, I remember when I did go back to somewhere like The Sando, I remember specifically walking into The Sando and getting a few funny looks from old friends even but it was the same thing I’d get from my family. People think “oh, you’ve changed, what are you doing here, you should be hanging out at wherever”.

Smyly: The Viper Room?

D: Yeah and I remember thinking “hey, I’m me. I’m the same Nic that run Half A Cow and played for the Plunderers”. I remember it really bugging me for years and probably why I started drinking more and there’s one story which still really hurts me and I walked into The Sando and Andy Lewis who was a friend of mine, he’s there playing pool with someone and I go “hi Andy” and he said “me and Stevie, we’re starting a record label, we’re going to call it Half A Cunt Records” and he just said it really meanly and I said “that’s good Andy, that’s good Andy” and I went and got a beer and at the time I just brushed it off but that stayed with me for years, you know.

S: Yeah, wow.

D: You know you’re friends because when I came back from The Lemonheads, I started a band Godstar which really didn’t play and meanwhile Stevie was in The Whiltams and Andy, they were really successful so I’ve always thought they ended up being more successful than me, yet they were … I don’t know if it’s jealousy saying we’re going to start a label called Half A Cunt Records, I mean is that jealousy? I don’t know but that’s always stayed with me and the fact that they’re both dead now and they were friends of mine. I’m really hurt by that and he was probably drunk but that’s always bugged me and I remember that happened at the pool tables at The Sando (N. Dalton, personal communication, Sept 7, 2007).
Andy Lewis played double bass for many bands, including The Whitlams, The Andy 500 and The Gadflys. At the time of his death in 2000, The Gadflys were experiencing the most successful time in their 17-year history, coming to national recognition through their appearances on the TV show *Good News Week*. Having been a friend and band-mate of Lewis’s during his years in The Andy 500, and having played with him in The Gadflys also, I can only speculate as to what his thinking was treating Dalton with such distain. I could agree with Dalton’s view of jealousy considering the glamour and events that he had spoken of having enjoyed as a member of an internationally touring group in conversations we had at the Sandringham bar. Understanding the level to which we all drank and smoked marijuana, it could have been a case of a clever line, delivered without the tell-tale voice inflections to signal a joke between friends. Perhaps I downplay notions of competition between peers, due to my ongoing internal search for understanding during those years. The comment obviously came as a shock to Dalton, again highlighting the usual friendly atmosphere of mutual support that existed at the venue.

Friendly competition was also evident in the way members of the community dealt with the increased success of some of the bands that played regularly at the Sandringham. In the incident now remembered by Mark Hyland, The Whitlams became the recipients of some community-led payback, perhaps for attracting non-community members to the locally supported venue.

Hyland: My favourite McBodybag story, The Whitlams had a gig there, it was when they had started to branch out and they were playing on a Thursday night for five bucks so that was the sort of level they were at. But there were a lot of people from Balmain that were coming and they needed a support backing and Tim came up to me and Harry at the Gruesomes the week before and said “are you guys free next Thursday?” “Yep” “Can McBodybag play?” “Yeah, we’ll do that.” “I’ve got two conditions, I want you to play acoustically with no drums and I want you to be called Crosby, Stills and Detective Sergeant Harry Ree of the Hong Kong Police Specialist Squad.” “Why?” “Because I just want to see that in Drum Media.” “Yep fine, we’ll do that.” So the next week the Sando ad comes out with “The Whitlams plus Crosby, Stills and Detective Sergeant Harry Ree from the Hong Kong Police Specialist Squad so we could get up there. So Harry’s playing acoustic guitar, Phil’s on bass and I’m playing electric guitar.

Ree: But the drums were set up.
H: The drums were set up, The Whitlams were set up, they’d had a sound check.

S: They probably had Stuart Eadie playing by then.

R: That’s right.

H: Yeah and Stevie was playing and Michael Vidal was playing bass I think. I think Andy had left by that point and then they did the sound check and fucked off down the street for some dinner and we got up and started doing, we did three or four songs and there’s a song of ours called Angel on a Train which I wrote in about as long as it takes to sing it. I used to labour over these songs through the week and I decided I should try just writing one off the top of my head and see if it works and Justin Hayes, for a long time, thought it was the best song I’ve ever written. He was clearly deluded. Justie and Pat were there and I think they’d been upstairs, I don’t know, they were speeding or something or other or dropped a tab but they came downstairs and were sitting there and I went up to Justy and said “we’re going to do Angel on a Train, the drums are set up, do you want to get up and just play a little bit of stuff on it. “Fuck, can I? Fuckin’ love to.” He did about three songs of ours and so “This is our special guest Justy Hayes is going to get up,” got behind the kit and I don’t know if you’ve seen Justy play…

S: I could imagine.

Hyland: So we did this partial version of Angel on a Train and then I did the riff from Momma’s Going Out which is Justy’s song that the Whitlams had done a cover of (sings the riff) so he started bashing the drums and then we finished that and this is allegedly all acoustic and so things just got turned up a little bit so we did that and then I think Harry went and played (sings another riff) the riff from Gough. But we used to sit around playing Whitlams tunes from the first two records and we’d phone up Freedman when we knew he was away and fill up his answering machine with versions of us sitting around playing songs of his. And we ended up doing about half a dozen Whitlams’ songs really badly with Justin and it got louder and faster as we went along and people left, people were leaving. Pat was sitting there laughing his head off, Davis was working laughing and Bow was there and the people who knew us, who were regulars there thought this was really quite amusing and all these people were leaving because it was so fucking awful. Then we finish and we’re outside having a laugh about it and the Whitlams, Stevie and Tim, come back from dinner and go “what the fuck have you guys done? We left, there was 50 people here and now there’s 10, what the fuck have you done?” and so we told them what had happened and Tim was “you cunts, what the fuck did you do that for,” and Stevie’s just laughing his head off going “fucking hell, I can’t believe I missed it” (M. Hyland and H. Ree, personal communication, Aug 28, 2008).
There are a good number of issues played out in this anecdote. Hyland was offered the gig at a Tuesday night Bernie and Stevie “Gruesome’s” show, an example of a music-making community pathway (Finnegan, 1989) that limited access to the scene by offering support gigs to known scene member bands. Considering the physical size of the hotel, a reduction of 40 people was a significant and easily noticeable reduction in audience size. The loss of such a crowd would have had a decided impact on the venue’s revenue for the evening, but the bar staff (Davis Claymore and Bow Campbell, both members of hard-rock band Front End Loader) enjoyed the humour and the obvious effect on The Whitlams’ ‘new’ crowd, “from Balmain” as Hyland describes them. Balmain had become a much more affluent suburb by the mid-1990s, not the working class, socially leftist enclave of artistic vibrancy it was during earlier decades.

By attracting more affluent audiences, The Whitlams were now open to local critique, here in the form of thrash versions of their ‘hits’, songs now receiving high rotation airplay on 2JJJ. Despite the strong evocation of place in several Whitlams’ songs (Carroll & Connell, 2000), the local band are interested in contesting this view by performing the songs in a way more in keeping with the culture of the place. The wealthier, perhaps better dressed patrons attracted to the place by the Whitlams’ national success, eager to experience the ‘Newtown’ the band was seen to perform, was challenged by the locals restating their claim over the place, and the songs from that place. The butchering of their ‘popular’ songs by a band of locals operates in a way like the levelling effect of the stage building discussed elsewhere in this thesis. Freedman’s joke, the ludicrous band name published in the street press could only be turned on its instigator in this place. His control of the event through requesting acoustic performance and by leaving the drums for his band set up on an already cramped stage, offering only limited space to perform, could be usurped by the community culture that allowed little artifice.

“There’s no room for tricks at all” (C. New, personal communication, Sept 11, 2007), Craig New remembered when discussing the stage. There was no room for ‘tricks’ in a broader sense as well. As a ritual space, the events play out in terms of the culture that surrounds them (Fonarow, 2006: 243), and the community resists ‘fame’ by bringing all into line with the prevailing cultural narrative. The
Sandringham operates like a repository of community knowledge with members of McBodybag knowing the songs (but as they clearly state, only from the first two Whitlams’ albums, being those Stevie Plunder and Andy Lewis penned songs and played on), so the liminal space created during ritual opens and McBodybag’s performance quite naturally defies the controls placed on it.

**Community Knowledge**

This story brings into play another role the Sandringham played in the complex narrative that meandered through its walls. As a meeting point for many community members, and as a place where discussions and interactions occurred, the hotel became a repository of community knowledge.

Anonymous: Well, no I think it was definitely if you wanted to meet someone for a beer and a chat that you hadn’t seen for a while or you were going to go out to dinner somewhere up there, you’d meet at the Sando and then go on from there or whatever. So you wouldn’t even know what was on there at the time but if you wanted to arrange to meet somebody that was as good as spot as any and you knew the people behind the bar so you’d have a chat to them while you waited for your mates to turn up. You were pretty much guaranteed of having a quiet chat any time.

Smyly: So you found it operated as a community meeting point for you.

A: Oh absolutely, if something bad had happened you know, if someone was in strife or someone died or something like that, the first place you’d go because you knew everyone else would be there to find out what happened and what to do, you’d go there because you couldn’t ring each other up, you’d just hear about it and just go and catch up with everyone there. That happened on heaps of occasions, you know (Anonymous, personal communication, Oct 28, 2007).

The ubiquity of mobile telecommunication devices was yet to impinge on social organising at the time these events took place. If there were new items of community information, the success of a band, the death of a friend, a new house found, or just a gathering before a journey together, the Sandringham provided the meeting point for a like-minded group. Information was passed back and forwards, updated, checked against new events, and ultimately disseminated throughout the community frequenting the site. As this anonymous interviewee stated, the site transcended the
‘rough pub’ descriptor many ascribed to it, to be seen and used as a place where community members sourced information about the lives of those who identified with the site. Being a community meeting point, the Sandringham also provided a convenient address for mail to be received by regular patrons and musicians. Julia Richardson recalls receiving mail via the site.

Richardson: Remember we used to get mail at The Sando.

Smyly: Really?

Hayes: Yeah, I got postcards from people. Stevie and I used to get postcards.

Smyly: Right, so it became poste restante.

Hayes: Not from weirdos, just from people who were travelling and thought “I’ll just send it to The Sando, it’ll find them”.

Smyly: Yeah? Wow.

Hayes: That was quite good.

Richardson: That was frequent enough.

Hayes: That sums up the nature of the place, you know. You understand all that sort of thing (B. Hayes and J. Richardson, personal communication, Aug 16, 2007).

This story highlights the extent to which the Hayes brothers were seen as identified with the site in the minds of the community members. The fact that the brothers played on regular nights meant people could count on them being in the place to receive mail from overseas. They knew they could make connection with the community through addressing missives with the easily recalled ‘Sandringham Hotel, King St, Newtown.’

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I have discussed the way the people who frequented the Sandringham identified with the community there, and the way the community built and operated the particular culture it developed through individual’s participation in rituals enacted at the site. Parts of the physical space were re-modelled by the community
members, with no support or sanction from the owner, and this action deepened a sense of ownership over the place in the minds of those people. This community ownership could be seen when the community was dispersed after the music-making infrastructure was replaced with gambling machines and the new owner’s management focus shifted from music-making to simpler forms of revenue raising. At times of crisis during the music-making days, in one instance the outbreak of fire in the community re-modelled backyard, musicians, staff and patrons joined to protect and support the building, mirroring the support and protection they felt towards, or looked for and received from the place. The community developed a culture of inclusion, supportive of people from different age groups and ethnic backgrounds, but remained one that interviewees felt was made up of ‘like-minded’ people.

The management of the place specifically sought to encourage diversity through identifying non-represented music genre following groups from the area, their favourite bands, and inviting these bands to perform in a place they had not performed in before. The management, closely identified with the community as it was, also encouraged diversity in the styles of music represented, offering music-makers whole days to stage avant-garde art/noise band events. Inclusive music-making, being the focus of the daily rituals of the place, became the binding principal holding the community together offering a point of connection for those that worked, performed and socialised at the site.

Notions of ‘community’ and ‘scene’ (Straw, 1991b) are discussed in relation how interviewees expressed an attachment to the ‘sense of community’ they felt through connection to the place. The ‘Sando scene’ is identified as one operating through music-making, and the community is defined by some as one of musicians, many working there as bar staff and socialising there. Another saw the community as one of “black sheeps” (sic), but all expressed a deep connection to it. Interviewees met many people who remain significant in their lives through their involvement with the site, and this confirms their view of the place as constituted by “like-minded” people. The community felt the impact of gentrification (Gibson & Homan, 2004) through a change in clientele, but continued its support of local artists through unwritten
policies of inclusion and the organization of charity, and other community based events.

The place was seen as an extension of the home in the minds of many interviewees. Warren Spooner, the first owner to offer live entertainment at the pub wanted others to think of the place as a lounge room, at times allowing bands to ‘dress’ the room with their own furniture. This intention was passed on through the life of the live music-making venue and interviewees mentioned how they made more personal use of the space. The physical size and shape of the place had an important influence on the socialisation that took place there. Being small and having a dominant square bar in the centre of the room translated to a feeling of connection with others in the place, and social connections were assumed at times, even though people had not met and talked. Regular visitors nodded their acceptance to other regulars, confirming a sense of belonging to a bonded community, facilitated by the small space and the architectural layout.

Although the people in the community regarded music-making and appreciation as a way to connect with others, and musicians found bar work and musical collaborators there, conflicts arose due to national and international recognition of some musicians. The place became the site where these conflicts were played out, either directly through conversation and personal interaction, or indirectly through musical parody and re-interpretation of music identified as belonging to the community and the place. Finally the site operated as a store-house of community information that could be modified, discussed and disseminated through the various pathways of interaction that people took through the site.
Chapter Three

The Stage at the Sando – “Yeah but then you made it, that little turf that we’d created”

All memory involves identification, the fleshing out of ‘what happened’ – of experience – through reference to some marker of that experience. In this sense, recall is knowledge production, activity; it is a representation of historical events (DeNora, 2003: 74, 75).

The experience in this case, the ‘what happened’ in the history of the place, was the nightly building of the stage from which all performances at the Sandringham emanated. Markers ground the memory, and in this case the memorable markers were the milk crates and four pieces of plywood that were dragged from the men’s toilets and put together to build “that bloody old stage they had there in the corner that you had to make yourself” (S. Bower and J. Lowe, personal communication, May 30, 2007). By their daily use these robust, stolen and shabby materials become artefacts in the ritual process of making the platform. Artefacts hold social and political meanings (DeNora, 2000: 35) and by looking at these artefacts essential to the live music rituals played out at the Sandringham Hotel daily it becomes possible to further illuminate the socio-political elements that built the culture of the place. Significant meaning invested in the stage can be seen in the above quote, highlighting the personal investment in “that little turf we’d created” (N. Dalton, personal communication, Sept 7, 2007).

There is a long and detailed discourse surrounding the process of decoding social meanings from music performance events. Cook (2008: 55) discusses how ethnomusicologists continue to draw on the writings of Theodor Adorno when looking for social contexts to place performance meanings in. He refers to Subotnick’s description of Adorno’s theorised connections between music and society as “indirect, complex, unconscious, undocumented, and mysterious” (Subotnick, 1976: 271). This chapter, by looking outside the music (or literally
below the music’s performance) in an anthropological way, aims to seat the connection between the music and the culture through the community’s use of space and materials to facilitate live music events. The use of the space and materials in the nightly building of a stage became ritualised in the minds of the people who used the site for music-making. The process came to hold meanings that were beyond the functionality of the platform.

This chapter will discuss the performance platform at the Sandringham with relation to three specific aspects of its function within the culture of music-making at the site. Firstly, the position of the stage as an extension of the bar, and its proximity to the audience will be seen as central to the way access to music was mediated and maintained. Secondly, the process of constructing and deconstructing the stage, and how this process encodes traits perceived as unique to the Sandringham Hotel at that time will be highlighted. Thirdly, the choice of materials used to constitute the platform, and what those choices show about the culture of the place will be positioned within the cultural sphere operating at the site.

**Position**

The stage at the Sandringham Hotel, from when it came to be used sometime around 1984, was built each evening (or afternoon, depending on the day) and packed up again after each show. It was placed between the south wall of the room and the central bar, so that the band, for the most part, played across the bar enclosure to the audience. The stage extended from the King St wall of the hotel, along the south wall, for no more than five metres. The distance between the central square bar and the wall on this side was no more than two metres making the area relatively small for a full rock band to set up a drum kit and amplifiers, and at times keyboards (see Figure 5). Looking to explain how this position of the stage affected the way audiences related with live performers other studies on indie music venues found “the event space does not in and of itself determine participant structure” (Fonarow, 2006: 12) at live music performances. However, the space at the Sandringham was not used for any other types of events as were the venues studied in Fonarow’s research. It was a live music venue only, and the strictures of the available space led
interactions between bands and audience members along similar lines, in the view of people who played and performed there, despite the proliferation of styles and genres offered.

The depth of the stage, the distance between the bar and the south wall of the hotel, was no more than two metres and this provided a relatively compact playing area. If the Sandringham Hotel is positioned in the Oz Rock cultural narrative, where vibrant, alcohol charged performances emanate from “huge brick sheds” (Cockington, 2001: 184), the size of the stage speaks against this. The performer’s position in relation to the audience is best viewed through a more individual focus on this specific stage at this specific site, particularly within the inner Sydney pub rock scene. In a cogent analysis of outside forces threatening the continuation of a pub rock scene in inner Sydney, Homan (2000) noted that,

\[ (T)he \ clumsy \ spatial \ reconfiguration \ of \ existing \ hotel \ architecture \ was \ crucial \ to \ its \ oppositional \ stance. \ The \ lack \ of \ space \ provided \ a \ discursive \ impact \ upon \ cultural \ practices, \ with \ the \ stand-and-deliver \ aesthetic \ of \ Oz \ Rock \ excluding \ more \ imaginative \ uses \ of \ hotel \ sites \ (pg \ 38), \]

The opposition here is a perceived musical mainstream, but performances at the Sandringham were not aimed at an ‘oppositional’ white, male Oz Rock audience, as Homan’s study suggests was the case in many instances. The stage position was ‘clumsy’, and the conditions cramped, but the most mentioned aspect of audience/performer interactions this offered in the minds of the interviewees, was a more immediate accessibility to the performances and performers. This proximity in turn engendered a sense of ownership in some respects, offering access to performance actions that at other venues, were usually hidden by distance or equipment. This is most evident in the interviews narratives offered by drummers.

The compact playing area had an impact on the way musicians could set-up for performances and therefore how they experienced performances at the venue, particularly for drummers. With the limited stage depth, drummers were effectively brought forward, contrary to their usual back-of-stage position. This put the drummer
in an equal position with other band members in relation to the front of stage, and therefore in relation to audience members. Lachlan Dengate, drummer with Panacea, Carbuncle Shack and stand-by drummer for the Shout Brothers, when asked to recall the stage spoke about the proximity of his playing position and the bar. Admittedly, it could be argued here that my familiarity with the stage and the prevailing culture has led me to ask the question in a way that prefigures the response he gave.

![Figure 5 – The Impossibles on stage. (l-r) Bow Campbell, Brendan Smyly, Geoff Martin, Dave Aston. Looking towards the eastern wall of the hotel from side stage.](image)

His response was enthusiastic though, and brings to light another interesting view on the connection between performer and audience.

Smyly: I think you’d probably agree that you always got good bar service when you played in the band.

Dengate: It was wonderful. I remember being able to sit behind the drum kit and you could literally reach over the top of the cymbals and the rack-tom and reach the bar (L. Dengate, personal communication, June 5, 2007).
Dengate, by describing his “reach”, offers us a physical sense of the narrowness of the stage, but also posits a notion of the performer on this stage being able to reach an audience within the performance. When we consider the usual position of the drummer in a rock band s/he is the one with the most equipment between them and the audience. A drum kit covers a musician unlike a microphone stand or guitar. Here Dengate opens the idea that the drummer on the stage at the Sandringham Hotel can reach an audience much like the other members of the group, reinforcing the notion of equality that permeated the culture of the place. The drummer can now perform within reach of an audience, and whose performance can be reached easily by audience members. The space that this availability opens allows a communication that defies the usual separation of musician and audience. This proximity, performer to audience and audience to performer, could also be seen as a factor in the building the community feeling expressed by the interviewees.

Warren Spooner bought the pub in 1980, and bands started soon afterwards. His financial position and the spatial limits imposed by the internal architecture compelled him to choose the bar-side stage position.

Smyly: One thing everyone has mentioned is where you decided to put the bands was interesting.

Spooner: (chuckles) yeah, the reality was there was nowhere else. Back then we had such a tight budget and to be able to optimise the little space that we had that was the only place it would fit.

Sm: Because there was that tiny back room wasn’t there? I remember that, it was a bit cut off though.

Sp: Yeah, that’s right and I looked a number of times and I believe that is the way it is today, extending that back section right back. Number one, we were lessees of that premises. Tooths Brewery owned the pub, we owned a lease on it and Tooths were more than happy for us to do whatever we liked but they weren’t going to help us financially so that made it difficult for us to outlay a lot in capital expenditure. And then, local councils were just beginning to get very twitchy about noise levels and all of those issues so to make major changes risked not being able to play at all. So really, we just felt that we had little choice but to run with what we had.

Sm: And put it right beside the bar and right beside the road.
Sp: That’s right. Yeah, it was crazy. I mean it’s the shortest lug in the universe but I have to thank for my pains, constantly ringing ears that I will have the rest of my life. I actually went through a period where if everything was silent I couldn’t hear (W. Spooner, personal communication, June 25, 2008).

Similar narratives concerning live music venue managers’ interactions with local government regulations and local community concerns (Homan, 2003b: 127) have highlighted the same difficulties in running live music spaces in inner Sydney. Spooner’s actions in avoiding planning legislation and consequences of more scrutiny from government representatives limited his options with regard to making improvements to the venue. The risks he talks of have been played out at many venues now and local governments are increasingly concerned with finding solutions to disappearing opportunities for young and also experienced local artists to practice their art. The low risk strategy led to his decision to place the stage next to the bar and right next to the street, and this offered musicians the “shortest lug in the universe”. This refers to the carrying of heavy guitar amplifiers and drums, and often the ‘lug’ involves stairs and long distances between the car/truck and the stage.

Facing the stage across the bar puts the bar staff in the loudest part of the room as he explains with reference to him developing tinnitus. From my time as a staff member I remember earplugs being supplied behind the bar and these were simple foam type plugs also made available to patrons at a price of one dollar. This was a policy introduced by Kirsty Lenthal in about 1994, and the hotel had been having live music nightly since the mid-1980s, so for the majority of the life of this venue the dangers posed by the proximity to loud music to the hearing of the staff went unaddressed. For a site that many thought supportive and productive, the lack of attention to long-term health concerns of staff speaks more of a culture of ‘easy fixes’ and damn tomorrow’s consequences, a theme common in rock music narratives. Spooner’s “crazy” is an apt description. As another drummer explains, the staff at the site were also brought into the proximity relationship Dengate highlighted previously. Dave Aston, drummer with Trout Fishing in Quebec and other groups, thought the architecture of the Sandringham played a significant role in his engagement with the venue. The position of the stage in relation to the bar and the audience are central to his memories of his first impressions of the place.
Aston: Well, I immediately thought that it was very different to anything I’d been in because of where the stage was, because the bar….and bar staff are between almost everyone and the band. So it was a very striking image (D. Aston, personal communication, Oct 23, 2007).

Aston’s move from past to present tense here is interesting, and as I found in other interviews speaks to the evocative nature of the recollections of the place. It also could be indicative of the changing views of interviewees, as retelling evokes reassessments in the minds of interviewees. “In one sentence the informant could be trying to reconstruct his or her perspective at the time”, (Kirby, 2008:30) while in the next, present-day assessment could be taking over. This moving of past occurrences to the present in narrative retelling has been evident in many of the stories collected for this study. Aston moves tense again in clarifying the architecture of the bar and the staff’s position inside it.

Aston: The bar is this big square and then the centre of that, they had their own little walkway around that other square section in the middle where the cash registers were and stuff. It was an interesting place (D. Aston, personal communication, Oct 23, 2007).

More than just being “an interesting place”, Aston said later in the interview,

Aston: I felt it was the only place that I could walk in on any night and there would be something worth seeing and you could sit down. You could sit down at the bar and have an unimpeded view of the stage (ibid, 2007).

The position of the stage meant that patrons sitting along the northern and western lengths of the bar looked directly at the stage, and Aston highlights this as unique among the venues he had visited. In fact, sitting in any position at the bar meant that direct lines of sight to the band were available, to some degree. To have the performers directly opposite, sharing the bar with you in one sense drew patrons into the performance. Aston adds this part on, supposedly as the memory emerges. A place to sit brings to mind a place to relax, to stay and feel comfortable. Later again, while discussing the venue more generally, he said,
Aston: ...and it had a sort of vitality that was really unique and I swear to god that the architectural layout was a big factor (ibid, 2007).

Aston expresses his identification with the place, a place he could “walk in on any night”, but notes the venue’s vibrant nature. This “vitality” could, in other settings, seem oppositional to a place to sit and relax, being viewed as an emotive and expressive outpouring of human energy. Not only is a feeling of comfort supported by the unique layout a sense of “vitality” emanates from this stage adding to the complexities involved in a more simplistic enthusiasm for participation in the ritual performances. The small stage and its position in the room had an influence on the way other musicians felt they interacted with audiences. Steph Miller of Roaring Jack, when asked a general question about the venue offered,

Miller: As I said with the big stage thing, the people who listen to records and then go and see a band play on a big stage but at the Sando it was just like there was no divide, it was just like you did it and you hung out with people on the footpath which is another thing about Sando (S. Miller, personal communication, Nov 7, 2007).

The ‘no divide’ comment is of particular interest here. Miller explains that the stage position at the Sandringham Hotel bridged the usual gaps between audience and performer by bringing them into the one physical sphere much the same as all attending are brought into one auditory sphere. As the venue was small, with no band room, and considering the large number of people who went to Roaring Jack gigs, the most convenient and comfortable place to relax between sets for both performers and audience members was the footpath outside the venue. The proximity of the stage to the footpath of King Street brought people together as they congregated outside, so performance positions and the non-performance positions are so close as to be considered inseparable, in his view, or could the whole space be considered an arena of performance?

The aurality of the performed music in such a small space has no boundary to negotiate, so too the perceived boundary between musician and audience was nullified in the minds of those who frequented the place, and interaction took place
freely. In the free flow of communicative gesture and sound we can see the “contemporary formation of the ‘palaver’ whose varied rituals played an important role in the social equilibrium of the traditional village or community” (Maffesoli, 1996: 207). Roaring Jack was a popular touring act at the time and Miller highlights the difference between the large and small venue interactions between audience and performer he experienced, but qualifies this with specific details about the position of the stage at the Sandringham. In another sense, the space offered for music-making by the position of the stage was expanded to include the street by the positioning of the stage next to the eastern wall. Tim Freedman mentioned the street-side positioning, and included comparisons with other small venues he had played.

Freeman: And also having the stage next to the street is an important thing too. They do that in Melbourne quite a lot in Fitzroy. They have the bars at the front so the passing trade sees the music, then they go in and they get stuck at the other end. It's a model for quite a few successful places in Melbourne. I think it was more of a mistake at the Sando (T. Freedman, personal communication, June 2, 2008).

This physically connects the outside and inside, expanding the prevailing internal culture to the street. This ‘street’ culture is mentioned specifically by Nadia Rangan in the ‘Community’ chapter. Rangan and Freedman both compare the positioning of the stage as similar to stages they have seen in Fitzroy venues and Freedman sees this as a “model” for attracting audiences. The Sandringham stage position was a “mistake” he suggests, but Warren Spooner, the person responsible for the decision to build the stage there contradicts this, as we will see later in this chapter. Like Roaring Jack, the Andy 500 played all three sets when we performed there and the venue was usually crowded on those nights. Set break interaction on the footpath with audience members I recall included discussions on songs just played or specific moments during the performance¹. Instant audience feedback was provided on solos, arrangements, and even outfits. Personal and political discussions took place as well, all within this expanded space.

¹ This was prior to a crackdown on footpath drinking by Newtown police, after which many people retired to the backyard for fresh air and relaxation between sets.

² ‘Slam-dancing’ is a particularly aggressive form of dancing where participants slam into each other and suffer injuries as a result. A good description of slam-dancing or ‘moshing’ practices and can be
The positioning of the stage in relation to the bar was a dominant issue, mentioned by most interviewees when asked about their first impressions of the place. Like Aston, Craig New was a non-drinker but the bar was the focus of his first memories. New mentioned the bar in direct relation to the stage, and how the bar/stage had a decided effect on his expectations of how a venue offering live music could operate.

New: I remember the bar always weirded me out because I hadn’t been to many venues either, keep in mind, so I went in there expecting to see a band and the stage is behind the bar and you walk in thinking “how does this possibly work, this is ridiculous” and you know, you’re watching the band through the bar people serving and it was all very, very strange. But do you remember down the left hand side there was like that little narrow strip and I would always go and stand right up the front on the left hand side because it would be away from the bar (C. New, personal communication, Sept 11, 2007).

There is an idea posited here with his recollection that “the stage is behind the bar” that becomes significant in terms of how music was presented to the audience in this venue. When people visit a hotel they expect to be served from the bar, and that expectation could be extended to the idea that they would be served alcohol, or at least drinks, from behind the bar. New’s recollection of the placement of the stage behind the bar at the Sandringham posits the idea that it was music, as well as drinks, that would be served to an audience from behind this bar. Although it has been argued that “for Australian rock and roll of the late 1970s and early 1980s, alcohol consumption was central to suburban rock’s musical and social meanings.” (Homan, 2000: 38), New is reflecting as a person who was attracted to the venue by the music alone. He has never consumed alcohol. In his words, “never been drunk, never had a drink” (C. New, personal communication, Sept 11, 2007), so the position of the stage as seemingly part of the bar, takes on a different significance for him. The bar is serving music to him, and he was one of the many culturally intoxicated regular visitors, and eventual performers.

The dominantly positioned bar limited direct walk-on access to the stage to two small sections. One faced west, towards the men’s toilet where the materials that constituted the stage were stored, and audience members standing here looked at the band side-on. The other was the position New discusses below, where the audience
assembled between the King Street wall (and doors) of the pub and the eastern side length of the bar. Being a non-drinker this was the best place to see a band and be “away from the bar” (C. New, personal communication, Sept 11, 2007), in his view. People looked at the band from the front when they stood or sat here, and did not have to fully enter the venue to be very close to the performers. He mentions that this section of the venue became an unofficial under-eighteen’s space.

New: I guess I had no reason to even go to the bar even though that’s strange in that I was closest to the bar there really. I would have had more space away from the bar on the other side but that little strip as well was also always the under 18 section.

S: Right.

N: The unofficial … it’s where all the kids would try and go when they were sneaking in.

S: Yeah.

N: I actually remember doing, when my band had a fanzine and I was doing sort of comic strip and one of the comics, one of their episodes was set at the Sando and it was like there was … I remember drawing it up and having a little sign saying “under 18’s hide here” because that was where kids always used to go and the bar staff knew and sometimes they’d just let them go and sometimes they’d go “guys, get out”. They’d just go straight there because the knew that that’s where the kids were thinking that little strip would be their … and I don’t know maybe that’s why I first started going there because I was just 18 and I don’t know, it’s weird (C. New, personal communication, Sept 11, 2007).

People under the age of legal entry to a hotel could take one step in from the footpath and be directly in front of the performing band. The venue therefore becomes a space for contesting the legislation limiting access to live performances to people over 18 years of age. The social meaning here centres on access to live music performances, and as suggested earlier, issues around the service of alcohol governs this access, though I am not sure this is what was being suggested by Homan. When the venue was free of charge, as it was for the majority of performances, underage patrons could easily escape the notice of bar staff who were positioned further inside the venue. The staff passively challenged the law by allowing underage patrons to experience live music by not asking for identification and by allowing young people to stand in the space New describes. If the venue was full, under-eighteens could safely view the show from there and have three or four people between them and the
staff behind the bar. New continued to describe other aspects of the stage that, to him, influenced the way people interacted with musicians and music at the hotel.

New: There’s no room for tricks at all. It’s almost like being back-stage, maybe that’s why that little strip was so appealing because it’s almost like standing side of stage. That’s why people love doing that at Big Day Outs and things because you do get a different perspective (C. New, personal communication, Sept 11, 2007).

New has now built and manages a large and successful merchandising company that caters to many of the touring Australian indie groups. Therefore as part of his employment, he is often given ‘All Access’ passes to festivals and large arena shows, and these passes are considered the second highest level of back-stage access and highly prized in live rock performance circles (Fonarow, 2006: 138). This access affords him prestigious viewing spaces, mostly side-stage where the performance and the effects of the performance on the crowd can be viewed. Perhaps this type of proximity could be said to be available at all small venues, but New maps the proximity available to audiences at the Sandringham onto the side-stage experiences his ‘All Access’ pass-holder position offers him at the large festival shows. His experience of live rock music performances is seen as little changed between these two very different experiences. He talks with enthusiasm of the privileged position offered at the Sandringham, a position that offers him a more complex engagement with the performance that seems to be taking place within the band.

New: You can see them talking to each other, you can see their humanity… “You fucked up!!”, it’s like “whoa” you never say that from the front or whatever, you see them laughing at in jokes that you don’t pick up on and you can see what the joke is because you’re watching them doing what they’re doing and I guess you can see all that at the Sando (C. New, personal communication, Sept 11, 2007).

He finds that, like Lachlan Dengate can reach the bar from behind a drum kit, he can reach the internal dynamic playing out within the performance that remains hidden to the vast majority of people in large audiences. In contrast to how the audience further away sees and experiences the show, New experiences a more complex performance, reaching inside the band from his position of proximity in a more intimate way. The position of the stage at the Sandringham offered all patrons the space to experience this internal dynamic, this “no room for tricks at all” space. As these hidden aspects
of performance are made to appear, the stage mirrors a ritual space where the mysterious is exposed through ritual performance (Turner, 1969: 26).

Another comparison between the large venue live music experiences and music-making at the Sandringham was made by Steph Miller. Although it was a small venue, during certain gigs the stage offered more enthusiastic audience members the same space for expression offered by larger venues. Miller recalls people ‘slam dancing’ at the venue during Roaring Jack performances, despite the seemingly incongruous nature of the practice with the ethos of the band, the size of the venue, and intervention of the owner/manager at the time.

Miller: The things that I do remember is when like the stage diving and stuff and the thing that I think Alistair called slam-dancing. I think that was part of the punk thing which I thought was really funny. People would just jump off the stage which was very small and sometimes off the bar. That was stopped I think by Warren or by someone, he said “you can’t do that” but it did happen (S. Miller, personal communication, Nov 7, 2007).

The stage position, being adjacent the bar (see Figure 6), enabled the more enthusiastic patrons to step up onto the bar in order to launch themselves onto the dancers crowded into the space between the King Street wall and the eastern length of the bar. I witnessed this behaviour while working behind the bar for a Roaring Jack reunion show in 1994. As we continued this interview my interaction with, and personal knowledge of the site is acknowledged by my reference to the dangerous position of the ceiling fans. Issues surrounding the ad-hoc operation of the venue are also referred to, along with the ways the Sandringham functioned without regard to legal statutes relevant to the operation of live music venues in force at the time.

Although there are warnings about the reliance on ‘memory’ in anthropological studies (Berliner, 2005), some more specifically concerned with what ‘memory’ means, rather than its overuse, we can see Miller question his own recollection here. The veracity of his recollections about events that were regular occurrences, Roaring

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2 ‘Slam-dancing’ is a particularly aggressive form of dancing where participants slam into each other and suffer injuries as a result. A good description of slam-dancing or ‘moshing’ practices and can be read in Fonarow, 2006: 84. The scale of the slam-dancing at the Sandringham was much smaller than that discussed, but was no less enthusiastic or dangerous.
Jack having played at the venue on most Thursday nights for about five years, and all within a culture of intoxication, are best questioned by the narrator.

After Miller mentioned the stage diving that occurred during these shows I said,

Smyly: They’d be in danger of getting their heads cut off by the fan.

Miller: That’s exactly right, yeah. I think there was one above the bar and I think there was one just in front of the stage and I don’t know if my memory is serving me well but I think that was taken out.

S: Because people were getting up on the bar?

M: I think, it could just be my fertile imagination but I think it was because I’ve got this footage of one gig that we did there but I think there’s another one and I just remember this guy’s leg going really close to the fan thinking “oh my god, did that really happen?” Occupational health and safety.

S: Yeah, it wasn’t heard of was it, really?

M: No-one cared mate (S. Miller, personal communication, Nov 7, 2007).
The position of the stage being connected to the bar transforms the bar to ‘stage’ here. The audience, inclined to stage-dive find the adjacent bar offers a higher and easily accessible platform, and despite the danger of the ceiling fan, proceed to express their enthusiasm by diving from it into the other dancers. Here we see the also the shape shifting nature of the venue. The small size of the venue would generally suggest audience/musician behaviour and interactions that could be described as intimate, and yet we see slam-dancing and stage-diving, actions more common in larger venues. The issues of Occupational Health and Safety, and also the issues surrounding behavioural norms within the culture that prevailed at the Sandringham will be discussed in another section of this dissertation. Musicians naturally compared this unique stage with other places of similar size in the inner Sydney offering live music. Genevieve Maynard, when asked about the playing conditions compared the Sandringham with the Hopetoun Hotel in Surry Hills.

Maynard: Hoey, well … the Hoey was awesome, it was great. The carpet that your feet used to stick to, that was always cool and always really loud and packed and smoky and the great ‘Rock Against Work’ gigs. But I think the Sando was unique for its sort of ramshackleness and its size. It was big you know, that centre bar took up a lot of space and so it gave you a lot of space. Even when it was crowded you still had that empty well in the middle so it wasn’t like they could get 400 people in there and that I think was good.

Smyly: Right. So as a player you felt you had…

M: As a punter.

S: As a punter?

M: Yeah. As a player it didn’t really matter. It was better when it was packed when you were a player because there’d be people right in your face. I like that when I’m performing. I love it if there’s someone 30cm from me, it’s really fun but as a punter I don’t know. I think you could see that there was this big amount of space, you never really felt that claustrophobic like you did at the Hoey where you were just jammed like a sardine (G. Maynard, personal communication, Oct 2, 2008).

Conflict arises again with my assumption of Maynard’s position within the research project. The questions were asked to her as a musician and yet the experience is
narrated through her identification as a patron (or punter). My mistaken assumptions of people’s roles within the site speak to the research finding of the fluidity of role identification in the minds of the participants. If we look to find a rational for the normative separation of social roles being suspended, “communitas is contrasted with social structure”, (Hetherington, 1998: 97) and the Sandringham when seen as a space where liminality (Turner, 1969) operated, this contributes not only to the role switching that is apparent in the minds of the interviewees, but also to the equanimity of roles in the “no divide” (S. Miller, personal communication, Nov 7, 2007) space.

Maynard’s view of the place holding a “big amount” of central space, the space taken up by the bar, brings a sense of openness, and this openness is spoken of by other interviewees in a social sense as well. The position of the bar with relation to the stage at the Sandringham had a benefit for patrons on crowded nights, Maynard found, and this made it more pleasant than other crowded venues. Her description of the “ramshackleness” of the place is interesting also, this being the word Suzie Bower (personal communication, May 30, 2007) uses to describe the place when first asked to recall her time there, and confirms a general view of the Sandringham as a place where social order had to some degree, broken down. This made the space open to participator generated order, or an order built each day for the situation of that day, much like the building of the stage.

The positioning of the stage was determined initially by the positioning of the performances prior to any stage being built. Warren Spooner was the sole arbiter of performer choices in the first years the Sandringham operated as a live music venue. He would decide who played, and also where in the venue they played. Although no interviewees remembered this specifically, it seems the stage was added sometime around late 1984 or early 1985. Prior to this the band played on the floor in the position the stage was eventually placed. Bernie Hayes remains the most mentioned performer by other interviewees. Having played there in the early 1980s, and appearing on the last night in 1998, he remains the musician most likely to have played the most shows at the venue, having a regular Tuesday with his brother Stevie Plunder (Anthony Hayes), and a regular Sunday with the Shout Brothers for much of that time. He also played with the Tall Shirts, Lock, Stock and Darrell (LSD), Secret Seven, and an early line-up of the Gadflys. Hayes remembers playing at the venue as
a member of the Gadflys in 1983, he thinks. The band travelled from Canberra to play every Monday night.

Smyly: Was there a stage?

Hayes: No, you know when you set up the stage and there’s just that corner of a thing, it was that.

S: Just sat in the corner.

H: Yep.

S: Yep.

H: So, smaller but we had our own PA, we’d been doing that for quite a while so we brought it in and set up and Warren said “yeah, that’s great guys” and it didn’t matter that there was bugger all people there, if he liked it he put you on (B. Hayes and J. Richardson, personal communication, Aug 16, 2007).

Spooner’s decision to place the band just inside the venue could have been made so as to attract people passing by the hotel. The decision had the effect of making the street outside part of the musical space. His choices for the type of music played in the venue also had a significant effect on the space created over the years. As Hayes notes, Spooner chose performers based on his own taste. By making his own musical taste the deciding factor, and ignoring the more common drive to fill the venue for commercial reasons, Spooner set the scene for a space to evolve where music became the prime focus. With the performances taking place a few steps from the street, people passing had easy access to live music, and as new explained previously, easy access to the bar. Phil Blatch, bass player and photographer, also remembers playing at the venue in the early 1980s with his band Paris Helene, having travelled into the city from Campbelltown. He remembers setting up on the floor.

Smyly: How was it set up, where did you play?

Blatch: It was in the same place where the stage ended up being at the end.

S: The southern end of the bar?
B: The southern end of the bar but there was no stage we just played on the tiles. We just set up the gear on the tiles and that was it, yeah.

S: And the band fitted in between the wall and the bar.

B: Yeah, that was it. I think we lugged in the PA also (P. Blatch and L. Rowland, personal communication, June 6, 2007).

Blatch talked fondly of the playing conditions on the stage, when it was introduced, and mentions a particular auditory phenomena that was a consequence of the stage being positioned up against the bar.

B: I played bass there and the cabinet was so close to the bar and it would bounce back off and you could feel the bass banging into your knees so it was a real physical thing playing there, it’s nice, yeah (ibid).

The bass instrument and the bass sound are one and the same for him. The “cabinet” is the bass speaker, usually larger than the small speaker boxes used for guitar amplifiers. The audio reflections from the face of the tiled bar can be felt as they slap back to the performer. Here we see the makeshift, “all very, very strange” (C. New, personal communication, Sept 11, 2007) setting providing the player with a suitable acoustic fold-back system, a feature of sound systems usually used to project amplified sound back to the performers. This negated the need for an a more expensive and technologically advanced in-house sound system. The system that was eventually purchased by the venue offered only one fold-back send, meaning it was not possible to separate the amplified instruments and vocal performances in the fold-back. Natural slap-back or reflected sound from the bar meant that a more complex system was not needed to support good performances.

This audio phenomenon may have been one of the reasons Nic Dalton (personal communication, Sept 7, 2007) felt the stage offered a ‘safe’ place to play. With the bar rising about ½ a metre above the stage front he felt less ‘exposed’ to an audience for the most part, and Dalton discusses his feelings about this in the following section. The proximity and intimacy Dengate and New talk of, was tempered with an enclosed feel, highlighting the complexities of any universal understanding of the playing conditions. The enclosed feeling was sonic as Blatch explained, and physical
as Dalton discusses later. So the ‘reach’ and accessibility offered to an audience at the venue was accompanied by a comfortable playing space offered to the performer.

I was interested to find out when the stage was built, and how it came to be the unique platform it was. In the interview with Bernie Hayes, he frequently apologised for not remembering details like this clearly, and perhaps his apologies have something to do with the role he inhabited as a figurehead for the people who frequented the bar. His acceptance of this role can be seen in his feelings of responsibility to clearly recall the events I ask him about. This role as leader was one his partner, Julia Richardson referred to, and John Encarnacao and others referred to him in this role. Being the interviewee with the longest association with the venue, I asked him about the inception of the stage.

Hayes: I should have more recollections but…

Smyly: No, that’s okay. Production values I was going to ask about. Just explain to me, so Warren bought a PA and a stage.

H: Well the stage was, he cut the bits of board and you had to set that up on milk crates.

S: So that was his idea to put the milk crates out.

H: The very first version of that was an extremely… if you like… jigsaw puzzle (B. Hayes and J. Richardson, personal communication, Aug 16, 2007).

Julia Richardson is a nationally recognised musician, however, her view of the hotel was mediated, as she said, by her relationship with Hayes. Not being a regular visitor to the hotel until their relationship began around 1996, her contributions to the interview were invaluable due to the relatively dispassionate view she brought to the discussion. Literally, she cuts the issue down to size, and heightens my awareness that perhaps I am looking to make more of this architecture than it was in reality.

Richardson: I remember that the bar itself got used quite a bit as part of the stage, either by punters or the band.

Smyly: Some people have mentioned that there was a break down of space between the audience and the band because the band was sort of like at the bar with you.

Richardson: And it was a low stage in a small space.
Hayes: And I don’t know if it’s because of that, I’m never comfortable at a gig unless I’m sitting at the bar. That’s what I like about The Rose, you can still sit at the bar and watch and stuff.

S: And watch a band, yeah.

H: But it’s a good spot to be (ibid).

Richardson’s simple breakdown of the stage’s attributes was a pragmatic and realistic view that I had overlooked, the ‘elephant in the room’ if you like. Having played on many large stages at many venues throughout Australia, Richardson came to the venue as someone whose idea of performance dimensions was the inverse of the majority of performers who appeared at the Sandringham. A young musician, 21 at the time, who had received national recognition early in her career with Club Hoy, Richardson saw the stage height and its relation to the venue size as the principal (and obvious) factors in creating the intimate space that many interviewees spoke of. Hayes however, suggests that the intimate feeling came, for him, from the stage’s position as an extension of the bar and this has now become the default, most comfortable place for him at a gig. This view could be said to be more in line with the culture of alcohol consumption that many interviewees saw as prevalent at the venue.

The proximity to live music performances became inherently ‘intimate’ in Kirsty Lenthal’s view. Due to the small size of the venue no-one was ever too far from the bar, other audience members, or the performers and this led to the easy passing of the non-verbal cues (or verbal interjections) associated with enjoyment of, or displeasure with the music being presented. I wanted to know if Lenthal thought the architectural lay-out of the internal space affected this intimacy.

Smyly: Do you think it was the architecture of the room that had an influence on the intimacy factor?

Lenthal: Well the semi-circle of fear, the semi-circle of fear was the bar. So…

S: Just explain the semi-circle of fear.

L: Well, you know how people go and see bands and they don’t stand at the front? No-one will ever stand at the front. And they create that semi-circle, so that’s a semi-circle of fear.
There’ll always be one goon in the middle dancing or doing something. I dubbed the bar there, the semi-circle of fear, because…

S: Because we took up that space…

L: Yeah, we were the duds in the middle….(both laugh).

S: If you don’t like the band you can watch the bar staff.

L: Yeah, yeah, yeah…so I think that element was taken away for a lot of people, so people felt free to heckle…

S: Yep.

L: …because there was that space between them. I don’t know….don’t ask me why….you know, it’s a physics thing. People do it and still to this day people do it.

S: But that place overcame that, sort of. You’d be at the front but not be at the front.

L: Yeah, you could be at the front but not be at the front. And then you’d turn around and there’d be, I don’t know, five, six, seven people deep behind you, but that was all that you’d ever get. I think, definitely osmosis had a lot to do with it. You know, people standing, everyone being sardines with each other…

S: Because it was so small…

L: Yeah, and if anyone was having a good it was pretty fucking contagious, you know, people would have a good time. I was really horrified when Sandy sold it to Bob Gordon and George Kaligaras (?) who owned the Rag & Famish, in North Sydney. When they came in and stripped all those posters down from the back room, oooh… it was just horrible…and took all the old poker machines away, that took the 20c pieces….“I liked that.”….I liked that olde worlde vibe (K. Lenthal, personal communication, July 17 and 23, 2007).

Lenthal’s observation seems to contradict other research findings concerning the relationship between fandom and proximity at indie rock performances (Fonarow, 2006: 156). For her, the space directly in front of a band at other venues was reserved for a “goon” to dance around in, and the bar took up this space at the Sandringham. Staff become performers here, being directly in front of the majority of the audience. My personal identification as a staff member is made clear through this part of the interview. Another aspect of the bar dominating the front of stage was the lack of an empty space when the audience numbers were down. Small audience numbers tend to mean people avoid the stage front area (2006: 156) leading to the emptiness of the
room being emphasised. At the Sandringham this sense of an empty room was minimised by the decision to put the stage alongside the bar.

As Lenthal observed, although the venue was ‘intimate’ there was a degree of distance from the performers offered by the architectural specificities of the bar, and this distance made people more inclined to shout their disapproval (or approval, or comedy one-liners) across the bar. The sonic intimacy of the proximity to amplifiers and drums was available to the audience as well, with the added safety of having the large bar area between heckler and performer. Movement from other patrons, motion in time with the music or the bodily effects of laughter, or a lack of movement could be collectively felt, passed from one patron to another when audiences were crammed against one another like “sardines.” Lenthal’s last comments here are illustrative of the lack of recognition the Sandringham received from any of the cultural institutions concerned with the production and maintenance of vibrant creative spaces in inner Sydney, the State as a whole, or Federally.

The hotel was sold to new owners with little thought for the likely outcomes from that sale. Hotels already owned by the new publicans mentioned had been extensively gentrified, modernised to move income streams away from alcohol sales to the more stable profits derived from gambling. Neither the Rag and Famish at North Sydney or the West End at Balmain had a history of offering live entertainment. Lenthal lamented the loss of the 20-cent poker machines, and of the historically significant old rock posters that covered the walls of the back room at the Sandringham. These artefacts, similar to the materials that constituted stage, positioned the hotel outside ideas of ‘modern’ and reinforced a sense of authenticity at the place. How the materials communicated this to the people who frequented the hotel is discussed later in this chapter.

**Building and Un-building**

The process of building the stage at the Sandringham Hotel was as follows. A short walk, six or seven steps from the bar led towards the men’s room door at the southwest corner of the bar room. A panelled wooden door was gripped by a stainless
steel, half-moon handle and pulled outwards. The sprung hinge of this door was slack from wear, and the slow recoil allowed you to step down one small step to the cement floored hall that lead to the men’s room proper. Looking up, the ceiling here was corrugated iron with exposed wooden beams, as the door in past years would have led outside, down the side of the hotel to the men’s toilet in the backyard. In this hall, along the southern wall were many Dairy Farmers’ milk-crates, perhaps 90, stacked high in rows almost to the ceiling. These brown and blue plastic cubes were used often, as coffee tables and bed bases by the students and artists living in cheap accommodation on offer in the surrounding suburbs. The crates were then carried, sometimes five or six high, back through the outer toilet door and after a few steps into the room, past one of the room’s large support beams, scattered along the floor between the bar and the wall. In the small space the sound and movement of this action could become dominant and patrons’ attention was usually attracted.

The four boards that became the platform were leaning against the opposite wall of the men’s toilet hallway, and comprised two large rectangles, a smaller rectangle and an even smaller triangle. On the back of the smallest rectangle was a schema drawn in thick, black felt pen, the same as used for writing set lists and carried by sound engineers and rock music road crew. This schema gave the pattern for fitting the boards into the space and on top of the scattered milk-crates. In Bernie Hayes’ view a “jigsaw puzzle” (B. Hayes and J. Richardson, personal communication, Aug 16, 2007). In the interests of triangulation it is important to document the building process from the narrative supplied by one of the musicians (however problematic that designation is) who built the stage on many occasions. Gen Maynard describes the getting of a gig, the nature of the materials, and the overall feel of the playing conditions at the venue.

Maynard: Well no because we got a gig there Cathy Wemyss had already been playing there with Saigon Children’s Choir and she knew Sandra (Spoon) reasonably well. So she took our demo tape in and said ‘Sandra, I’ve got a band for you’ and so we got a Sunday afternoon gig or something. So we already knew from Cathy that we’d have to set the stage up and I remember the stage was like this series of wonky marine ply board or chipboard or something and milk crates stored near the boy’s toilets and the boards were stored in the boy’s toilets and you’d have to drag them out and then on the back of one of the smaller pieces of boards there was a really bad diagram of how it was all supposed to fit together. So
that was fun and the first time there, the PA was really bad as opposed to just being bad. It actually got quite good at one stage, the PA there but the fold back was just crap that first gig but it wasn’t really about that. There were places that, there were places that were far worse like the Evil Star (Evening Star Hotel) for example. You know, you had more space at the Sando even though it was that long, skinny stage and half the band or two thirds of the band was always hidden behind the bar. At least people could see you from the knees up, yeah (G. Maynard, personal communication, Oct 2, 2008).

As a woman, the fact that the materials were stored in the “boy’s” toilets is accepted, but the use of the juvenile term, rather than the “men’s” may speak to the way Maynard expresses her understanding of the way the stage storage space ignored gender equanimity. This would confirm previous findings regarding pub rock sites that “venue practices were hardly incompatible with former male leisure traditions” (Homan, 2003b: 102), although women were often in positions of power and could have addressed any concerns.

This presupposes the ethos of the site was open to feminine challenge, something not considered in this study. A place like the Sandringham with a firm identification as a ‘rock’ venue may have resisted moves to accommodate a more feminine sensibility, however with the limited space available alternative storage spaces would have been impractical. None of the three female musicians interviewed made specific mention of this as an exclusive practice, and none mentioned the building process as a barrier to female inclusion in the rituals of the place. Making the men’s room hallway an available space for all sexes could be seen as another example of liminality suspending social structure through the ritual processes practiced at the Sandringham.

As “artefacts do not compel users to behave in preferred or prescripted ways” (DeNora, 2000: 35), techniques employed in achieving the finished stage were various and highly performative, signalling to those present various personal or group attributes. Lifting one of the bigger stage pieces alone provided that night’s performer with a way to signal strength and skill, attributes easily ascribed to hard rock performative practices. Alternatively, comedic drug affected, nerd clueless, or clownish behaviours could be employed in the ritual, thus flagging to the patrons and staff the nature of that evening’s performance and the attitude of the performers. In
the confines of the small space displays of ennui or muscular dexterity were easily viewed by all patrons and staff. Building the stage was the job of the first band, or the band that was playing the whole night.

Several nights were offered to regular bands, famously Roaring Jack on Thursdays in the mid-to-late 1980s, Paris Green on Monday nights in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and The Shout Brothers on Sunday nights from the late 1980s until the close in 1998. Packing away the stage was the job of the last band (or the three-set whole night band), and the performer’s wages for the evening were withheld until the pack-up was complete. If earlier performing musicians wanted to wait for their payment it was contingent on the last performing band packing the stage away and thus pressure was sometimes brought to bear for this process to begin.

Along with the conflicts inherent in playing orders among competing bands, the stage packing dynamic provided another place for this conflict to play out. Earlier acts could harass later playing, and perhaps more prestigious and better known bands while they relaxed in the glow of their just ended performance, and this could ameliorate their feelings about having played at a less preferred time on the bill. This stage building/stage packing process was unique among the other inner Sydney live music venues at the time. Some, like the Rose of Australia at Erskineville had the band play on the floor at that time, but nearly all had a permanent stage.

Nic Dalton, when asked about whether the Sandringham reminded him of other venues offered,

The Sando was always … just having that bar … well The Lansdowne was similar with the big bar but it was bigger and The Lansdowne had, at times, seemed like your shitty little venue but The Sando sort of really was because it had the nice tiles. I would never have called it dirty but it just had a great feel of like an old pub and the fact that you had to pull the stage out and all that. It was pretty different to a lot of other gigs but I never felt it was that different because I’d known it so long and it was always just The Sando and you knew what you were going to get and you always knew you were going to have a good time, always (N. Dalton, personal communication, Sept 7, 2007).
Dalton looks to identify a specific aspect of the venue that set it apart here. He first mentions the bar, and identifies the bar at the Lansdowne Hotel as similar in size and shape. He positions both as “shitty little venue(s)” but then qualifies the Sandringham as “really”, or perhaps more authentically a “shitty little venue”, due to a) the tiles and b) having to build the stage. The symbolism of the stage building seems to be alluded to with “and all that.” He clarifies this in the following exchange.

Dalton: I just remembered then because we had to go to the toilet, drag the milk crates and the big boards and build the stage ourselves. I always felt it was different to a lot of the other venues because you were creating your own little space and you’re doing three sets and everyone is going to get drunk and you were like in your little bunker.

Smyly: Right, because you were protected by the bunker.

D: Yeah but then you made it, that little turf that we’d created. Like I was saying before, is it the good times of being younger that you hark back on?

S: Yeah, yeah maybe we’re glorifying it a bit (ibid).

So my awareness of my own enthusiasm for the venue and its culture is evident here, and it could also be important to state that although we shared an enjoyment of the culture of the Sandringham (not ignoring the different ways we participated in that culture), this interview was the first time we had spent more than a minute or two talking together. Bennett (2002) laments the lack of distance insiders bring to studies of scenes they describe, saying their “one-dimensional voice…echoes the self-assumed ‘rightness of the movement,” (pg 457) seen within the research. My personal views on the venue could have been adequately supported by many people, so the choice of interview subject, people known but less familiar like Dalton, has played a key role in adding reflexivity to how researcher preconceptions are mediated throughout this discourse.

Dalton says, for him, the Sandringham was a great place to play. He also brings to light another aspect of the stage not mentioned by others during the interviews. By the act of building the stage a certain ownership, or sense of value is engendered, and the performance takes place from a self-created space. With the personal investment
of time and energy into the building comes a sense of ownership of the space being created for the performance to take place. This space is marked in its making by the performer elevated upon this marker of experience. The performer takes his/her place at the bar with the other patrons, and feels connected to them by this proximity and by the act of creating the space to perform. Dalton uses the word ‘bunker’, a place that presupposes safety (and perhaps separation), and it is interesting that the space created by the building process offers this to a performer.

Connected as it was to the bar, and therefore to those around the bar, the closeness with the audience has been described by others as representing “no divide” (S. Miller, personal communication, Nov 7, 2007). Yet Dalton’s perception could mean the ‘no divide’ required some protection, some form of performer/audience barrier in a venue that offered none. If there is space for “no tricks at all,” (C. New, personal communication, Sept 11, 2007) this performer requires some distance, and the stage with its ½ metre bar frontage provides this. Considering the conflicts Dalton talks about and documented in the ‘Community’ chapter this protective bunker where he could enjoy performing is easily understood. He may experience some live performance anxiety but made no mention of it during the interview. I am inclined to view his ‘bunker’ not as a place offering safety from an audience, but more a space that offers a safe place in which to create and perform music. At another point in the interview he said,

Dalton: I remember it being a really shitty little pub with this big huge bar and you played on one end and people were in like a horseshoe around you (N. Dalton, personal communication, Sept 7, 2007).

He positions the playing position “on” the bar here, and the audience are positioned “around”, in his view and this fits with the idea of the stage offering a safe place to perform. This idea of a safe place is conflicted by descriptions of the platform as “ramshackle” (S. Bower and J. Lowe, personal communication, May 30, 2007), among other descriptors which denote the space as unsafe, again confirming the place as one in which notions of a unified ‘scene’ or ‘culture’ are contestable. Justin Lowe places the building of the stage beside his vivid memories of the place. In a general discussion of the Sandringham, early in our interview he said,
Lowe: I can still picture that place like it was yesterday. I loved that bloody old stage they had there in the corner that you had to make yourself.

Bower: Because it was so ramshackle, you know…

L: Ramshackle? The only one who knew how to do it was Stevie and once he was gone you could see these people trying to figure out the…(ibid).

The making of the stage invokes his reverie, or is fore-grounded when he is asked to recall the place in a very general way. His affection for the stage building process could be said to grow from the degree of insider knowledge he considered it to hold, and insider knowledge is close to the place, knowledge of a place loved but now gone. My want to be included in Justin’s group of exclusive knowledge holders is apparent in the immediate response to his ascribing the knowledge solely to Stevie (Anthony Hayes).

Smyly: There was a little map…

Lowe: Was there?

S: …on the back of….cause there were three large pieces and one small piece...(Bower laughs)..there was a little cryptic clue written on the back of the, drawn on the back of the little triangle piece and I remember sitting at the bar some nights when someone would come up from Melbourne, someone like ‘Superjesus’, I think it was came in to play and looked absolutely…

L: That’s right. They looked aghast. They’d driven all the way from Adelaide. That’s right… driven all the way from Adelaide…I remember, I saw this guy’s reaction and I looked around and saw ‘blah, blah, blah (band name on the board), - Adelaide”…thought aww they’ve driven all that way (laughs). Probably just straight across the Hay-Balranald, you know, plains there…(ibid).

The interaction exposes an attempt to place myself in a privileged position, one Lowe and Bower were unaware of. Both were approached for this project as regular patrons and therefore neither would have been required to build the stage in their time frequenting the site. By their narrative however, it is clear both were witness to the many varied actions and responses of those required to build it. Lowe expresses empathy for ‘outsiders’ by referring to the rigours of long distance car travel,
something discussed by many touring rock artists in Australia, and something the members of touring bands, who socialised at the Sandringham discussed. He alludes to the humbling experience of travel weary musicians from outside the community being made to build their own stage, something witnessed and enjoyed by several of the interviewees. So where Nic Dalton ascribes ownership through the process of the stage building ritual, Lowe sees it as holding value in terms of access to the inside of the scene. The cognoscente insiders feign pity for the touring ‘name’ group and enjoy their descent into the Sandringham culture.

Bower’s comment concerning the “ramshackle” nature of the stage brings another issue to light. It could be argued that the do-it-yourself action of building the stage brings a rustic, or more authentic, more ‘punk’ ethos to the space. However, the notion of describing this stage as part of an ‘authentic’ ethos becomes problematic because “(a)uthenticity is a quality of selves and of cultures; and they construct each other” (Middleton, 2006: 206) My notion of what construes the ‘authentic’ in relation to this stage is constructed through my involvement in the repeated act of constructing the stage, not to mention playing on it, serving drinks to those on it and viewing performances coming from it.

If “authenticity remains a value that reinforces the collective agency of the scene” (Shank, 2006: 55), the stage building ritual radiated value in various ways and to varying degrees to the witnesses in the room each night. As Kirsty Lenthal mentioned earlier, the back room with its walls covered in old posters from past gigs and 20 cent poker machines (when most in other venues at the time accepted notes), the authenticity of the venue was further enhanced by these markers of the past. Middleton follows his discussion with a close analysis of Terry Castle’s ‘authenticating’ of Art Pepper’s work in jazz. He reads Castle’s placement of the descriptor as tied to her personal narrative, and this criticism could be placed on my (and other interviewees’) claims for the stage at the Sandringham influencing performers and performances, stripping each of pretension.

The act of writing this history, of constructing meanings and narratives from a time past is a personal pursuit, but also benefits from an ‘authentic’ voice, one that will convince, or at least intrigue, the reader. By basing the history on interview
narratives, personal preferences can become levelled by oppositional views offered by others. By being subjected to the stage building ritual outsiders are brought level with insiders, with some local derision thrown in for good measure, and the levelling effect comes into line with findings about the equanimity of status different roles played at the site exhibited. In looking to establish an authentic live music scene, if “(t)he impossible dream was to first abolish the distance, and then the difference, between performer and audience, the activity of one and the passivity of the other” (Laing, 1985: 82), then the stage building process at the Sandringham Hotel went some way to satisfying this dream.

Others mention the ‘levelling’ process this building and un-building engendered. By mentioning the name of a nationally recognised band in the interview with Bower and Lowe, the story of performers who played at the site assumes a hierarchical narrative (and a narrative wet with jealousy, in my view, being a musician who gained little national recognition). Some of the impetus could be analysed as a collective effort to bring the successful down; down to the level of the Sandringham, where everyone is equal before the stage, but no-one is worthy of the national recognition that The Superjesus were to receive. This same effort could be seen in the performance McBodybag offered before a Whitlams gig, well described by Mark Hyland in the ‘Community’ chapter.

The building process could also be seen to hold the key to access to the inside of a scene. Bernie Hayes confirmed this coded barrier to the scene when he explained,

…but it used to be a source of great amusement to those who did know how to set up the stage to watch a band come in. You were told they had to set up the stage and without fail, ‘cause of a sense of dignity “what, we have to set up the stage?” “Yeah, the bits are there and milk crates are just there” and just sit at the bar and we watched them and passing these bits of board around to each and it had angles on it, it had all these little bits and pieces that fitted into the bar (B. Hayes and J. Richardson, personal communication, Aug 16, 2007).

Hayes more explicitly named the “sense of dignity” performers found challenged when directed to build the platform. Like Lowe, he joins himself to the collective insiders in finding “amusement” in the confused stage building attempts. Through the frame of cultural geography this stage building knowledge could be seen as a
territorial marker, a way of forming a “bounded domain” (Crang, 1998: 111) with those holding the knowledge resisting outsiders through ridicule at attempts to decode the practice. The value of the marker is to codify the ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ of a domain, and we can see these hierarchies at play in these stories from ‘insiders’.

However, as Harry Ree comments later in this chapter, insiders at the site assisted people new to the process, thus passing the code across any perceived domain barrier, as well as facilitating the continuance of the prevailing culture by making live performances possible as a result of the successful building. Straw (2004) argues that since the demise of the craftsman’s apprentice, the codes for artists are passed on within scenes, like the one that flourished at the Sandringham.

... (pg 413)

Seen from this perspective the building of the stage moves from being simple necessity to an artefact indicative of the cultural processes maintained at the site. As DeNora (2003) writes the artefact of the stage is imbued with social and political meanings by those who built and packed it away. Steph Miller also found the stage building process unique to the venue and this next exchange touches on many of the points mentioned above. He was talking about playing at the hotel in the early 1980s, and I asked him whether there was a stage then or not.

Miller: It was the old milk crate stage because the pub was so small, it had island bar in the middle and all the space around it was the pub so it was the classic thing of having to pour all the milk crates out of the blokes’ toilet and putting bits of ply on top of it. I think there was three bits or maybe four bits, I think there was a little corner bit that no-one could ever get right and it was a diagram in texta on the back saying how you … and because everyone liked to have a beer it was like “how does this go together?” We’d get it upside down because there’s always a bow in one bit and you had to flip it over the right way. It was just fantastic, loved it.

Smyly: Do you think that had an effect on the feel of the place, on the culture of the place that the musicians had to build their own stage?
M: Definitely, yeah it was do it yourself a bit you know and I think that like when Warren started with the music, I think it was 1980, that’s what the T-shirt I’ve got says, yeah I think it was, I think it definitely was. It was like “wow, god” and he was very funny about it and because I was in my early 20’s and I thought “this is fantastic” because it was none of that pretension about it of going up to a big stage and standing on a big stage and being a rock star, it was just like “okay”. I think a lot of people, I know a lot of people from those days felt exactly the same way (S. Miller, personal communication, Nov 7, 2007).

Miller’s memories of the space are enhanced by the elegiac vision of musicians “pouring” the milk crates from the men’s toilet. His description is apt. The tumbling of these almost indestructible cubes out onto the floor invokes pouring, and Miller’s musician mind maps this well, recalling their intended function. He also mentions the way the building process undercut “pretension(s)”, in his view, with a decided “do-it-yourself” ethos being instigated very early in the hotel’s live music life. The idea of “rock star” is juxtaposed with the stage building process, and having been through the ritualistic process, performers could now be viewed in a more authentic way, and give more authentic performances to the audience crowded around the bar. Having played in the venue many times, and therefore being familiar with the stage, it must be acknowledged that my view of this building and un-building process is highly coloured by experience. There are mediating factors to this coloured view and these became apparent through the interviewing process. One interesting exchange occurred during the interview with Phil Blatch and this exposes issues around the extent to which I thought I was ‘in the know’ about the stage. Phil Blatch, when asked about his early experiences in the hotel said,

Blatch: The support band would put up the stage and use the milk crates and pieces of wood cut specifically to fit around the bar and if you were playing on the left hand side of stage it was a bit wobbly (P. Blatch and L. Rowland, personal communication, June 6, 2007).

Further on, when asked specifically about playing conditions he and I agree about the consequences of this “wobbly” section of the stage.

Blatch :… when I was playing with Bicycle Thieves I was on that left side end and it would always wobble under your foot, that bit there.

Smyly: Which always sends the microphone into your teeth if you go in to have a bit of a sing.
B: That’s right, when you go for the sing, that’s right (ibid).

When reading through the transcription of Steph Miller’s interview, the antidote for this problem became clear. He said, “(w)e’d get it upside down because there’s always a bow in one bit and you had to flip it over the right way” (S. Miller, personal communication, Nov 7, 2007). Both Blatch and I remembered the trouble with the shifting platform, and Miller offers the solution, and this highlights the shifting nature of any claim to a bounded set of insider knowledge within the community of music makers. The knowledge of the correct formation of the stage is passed through the repetitious process of building, but the smaller details, important for anyone who has experienced this microphone into the teeth movement caused by a “wobbly” board underfoot is more specialised. Miller performed many nights there with Roaring Jack, and these were weekly gigs meaning he experienced the building process repeatedly and within a shorter amount of time than either Blatch or I had. His insiderness is concentrated by this repetition therefore and the bowed board placement knowledge enhances his connectedness with the stage and the performances he participated in on that stage. This is a trivial matter perhaps, but in some way it lets me know that even though an insider position has enabled much of the access and information that form this project, the levels to which I perceive my own insiderness are being questioned through the process of conducting the research. In light of the current discussion about the building and unbuilding of the stage, as the project is being built with the help of my status within the community, my perception of status within the research is being unbuilt by the research itself. The levelling effect evident in many of ritualistic processes played out at the site continues.

Another factor concerning the interviewing process was a want to allow interviewees to decide what was important about the place. It was interesting to document the following exchange, with Peter Robinson, someone who had never built the stage.

Smyly: Anything you remember of the venue that you think needs to be documented?

Robinson: Well, there are two things that I remember that are typical Sando things, yes. One was, and because not being a musician and I was quite gob smacked when I heard that all these bands that played up there would have to build the stage, drag the milk crates out from
that little cupboard, put them on the floor and then put the top on. If you were the headline act you didn’t but it was mainly the support act but all the bands in the mid week who were headline acts would have to build the stage and I thought that was just hilarious and I thought that was typical kind of do it yourself, really independent Sandoesque things (P. Robinson, personal communication, Nov 2, 2007).

This ritual process is elevated to being indivisible from the place itself in his view. The term “independent” in popular music studies parlance is a contestable notion and a full discussion of its possible meanings is best covered by others (Encarnacao, 2009; Fonarow, 2006; Kruse, 2003; Langdon, 2009; Mathieson, 2000; Stahl, 2004; Walker, 1996). Robinson places ‘independent’ alongside ‘do-it-yourself’, quite naturally here, and the two are indicators of things “Sandoesque.” Along with Dave Aston’s “sando-centric” (personal communication, Oct 23, 2007), this term concentrates the culture to language dependent understanding. No place could be more ‘independent’, Robinson suggests, placing the venue in a hierarchy of inner Sydney music-making sites. ‘Do-it-yourself’ is indicative of the ethos of the place, allowing (or requiring) personal actions, effort and an investment of non-music making energy prior to being included in the music-making practices of the place. This personal investment led to a closer identification with the site, a process that some felt was a mark of achievement in their personal music-making practice. Lachlan Dengate found the stage building process to be a defining marker in his desire to play at the venue. His mention of the stage was early in our discussion and this could be suggestive of the value he places on being involved in the ritual. Like Miller, Hayes and others, Dengate clearly sees the stage building as a levelling process, and elevates what could be described as a poor ‘ramshackle’ playing situation to a perceived position of privilege.

Smyly: And when did you first play there?

Dengate: It would have been a couple of years after that. I remember it was a real special thing “hey, I’ve fuckin’ finally made it to the stage, I get to set up the stage”. Even that in itself was a real joy getting the milk crates out of the men’s toilet and setting up the stage. I’d reached my pinnacle, it doesn’t get any better than this.

S: So you saw it as a bit of a badge of honour to get there.
D: Yeah, totally, yeah because I’d spent a lot of time there watching bands by that stage so to be up there doing it felt great (L. Dengate, personal communication, June 5, 2007).

Further on, we talked about the playing conditions, and Dengate makes the building of the stage a principal factor in the discussion, overlooking other factors that others found important like the stage’s position at the bar (although he mentions this elsewhere in the interview), the poor P.A. system, the smallness of the stage, or any other of the mediating factors present in the venue.

Smyly: Tell me about what it was like, you played there and I saw you play there a lot with Panacea. I had to work behind the bar a few times and that was pretty good, tell me about the playing conditions at the pub.

Dengate: Yeah, well as you say, having to set up the stage I know it used to annoy a lot of bands and ‘artists’, you know “why do I have to go and collect milk crates from the men’s toilets, I’m an artist, I shouldn’t have to deal with these conditions”. I loved it, I loved the whole, just the process.

S: Do you think that had an affect on the musicians that liked the pub and the ones that didn’t?

D: I think so, I think it sort of culled the ones that were wankers and thought that they were too good having to set up a stage and it had nothing to do with how good they were. There were some of the most beautiful musicians I’ve ever seen played there and were quite proud to set the stage up (ibid).

In Dengate’s mind the ego-levelling action of the process meant that musical skill, although appreciated, was not the sole requirement for a musician to be accepted at the venue. Through the stage building process, he seems to say, musical skill is brought down from its perceived height to a level of equanimity with the other people at the bar. Many of the people at or behind the bar were musicians, so the prestige of musicianship or any privilege afforded membership in a band was nullified to a large degree. Liminality (Turner, 1969) is again invoked as musicians new to the venue are subjected to a localised cultural initiation through the “process” of stage building. This ritual most often occurred within a community setting with previous initiates gathered at the bar to witness and comment, but also to guide and assist.
Hyland: I remember going in after work, playing Tommy pinball machine or whatever and just sitting down with a beer because this was well before the band would start but I remember Davis would be behind the bar or Dave Edgar or someone. I remember a few times they asked me to help the band because there was always a new band maybe and they couldn’t set up the stage because it was really complicated … remember setting up the stage? It was really complicated. Davis would actually ask me to help them and give me a free beer for it. Because I was there earlier, they’d be setting up at six o’clock or whatever and they wouldn’t play till 7:30, 8:00, 8:30 whatever. You know, they were all nervous, they were really all nervous weren’t they. Sometimes, Statler and Waldorf … we’d just be sitting there watching all these bands starting off.

Ree: It was a rite of passage to set the stage up and there’d be half a dozen people there who knew exactly what to do but they’d all sit there and watch for 10 or 15 minutes and just laugh at these people and then someone would feel sorry for them and go “ah, this is how you do it” (M. Hyland and H. Ree, personal communication, Aug 28, 2008).

Ree directly names the action a “rite” through which musicians would pass. Hyland refers to Ree and himself as “Statler and Waldorf”, characters from The Muppet Show who sat watching and passed comedic judgement on the performers as they did from the bar on most nights at the Sandringham. Their place at the bar and their connection to the place afforded positions of power over “nervous” band members who were asked to build the platform. “Free beer” was offered by the staff for their assistance and this could be viewed as a tithe paid by the institution for insider information, skills upon which the nightly ritual rested. Even so, as Bernie Hayes mentioned earlier, the “friendly people” that Hyland experiences (in the next section) are happy to engage in insider ridicule, but only for so long. For the culture to replicate itself the performance must be set up, and the stage building was essential for this.

**Materials and Meaning**

If, as DeNora says,

*spaces may foster the use of particular cultural repertoires through the materials they place on offer, through atmosphere, objects, and other scenic features and through the ways that these materials may provide information*
that allows user-occupants to make ‘appropriate’ behavioural responses within those spaces (DeNora, 2003:129),

then how are the use of stolen milk crates and a plywood puzzle fashioned to create a stage each evening assessed, and what did this use telegraph to those who frequented the Sandringham Hotel? Other academic writers argue for the “interpretation of symbolic meanings as the true object of ethnography” (Austin-Broos 1987:148). What meanings could be derived from the choice of these materials, and how could they show us the actions that about the vibrant culturally creative place the hotel was?

I asked Warren Spooner who came up with the materials that constituted the stage.

Spooner: (laughs) I built the stage with … I’m not going to publicly admit to having stolen that many milk crates, however I’m trying to think …

Smyly: That was my next question, “Where did all the crates come from?”

Spooner: Yeah, I’m just trying to think whether it was Kim Constable from the Chooks and also from Ol’ 55 who cut the ply in the right shapes or whether it was one of the other boys but yeah, it was the cheap and nasty arrangement but it worked (W. Spooner, personal communication, June 25, 2008).

Spooner skips the issue of the illegality of using these crates. The Dairy Farmer’s Co-operative who manufacture and retain ownership of the crates replaces, in their estimation, nearly a million milk crates each year, and a walk along any of the café strips in inner Sydney will show these useful boxes used as alfresco seating. The illegal aspect of the crates has been mentioned by two interviewees only, but Spooner was the only interviewee who knew the crates’ origins. He avoids the question by shifting focus to the plywood stage top. This suggests that the space, dedicated and focussed on the daily production of live music-making, accepted some illegal practice as the norm. It was made clear in many interviews this was the case with regard to the use of illegal drugs, and as Craig New mentioned earlier, also the case with underage patrons being allowed to see the bands.
A time before workplace safety monitoring and stricter regulation by governments is often evoked when remembering practices ritually performed at the place. Mark Hyland, patron and musician, vested the stage materials with meanings that spoke to him of the economic shift that was taking place in inner-city suburbs at the time. His first impressions were,

Hyland: Big bar, friendly people there obviously and the homemade stage. I remember noticing the stage as all just milk crates and bits of plywood.

Smyly: That was unique I suppose.

H: Yeah and I remember I really liked it. I think I remember really liking it. I spent so much time there later. A lot of the year I kept on going back there so, it just felt really welcoming and it hadn’t been yuppified or hadn’t had anything done to it, it was still the grimy old pub like that, the ones I like. I was working in the city for a merchant bank and you’d go out after work and you’d go to chrome and wood and it would be shit and that was to an old proper pub (M. Hyland and H. Ree, personal communication, Aug 28, 2008).

The process of gentrification that continues in the inner-western suburbs of Sydney which has led to the disappearance of many opportunities for musicians has been well studied (Homan and Gibson 2004), and the effects of this process on live music venues has also been the subject of federal government funded quantitative study (Johnson and Homan 2003). Hyland’s liking for the “proper pub” is brought into sharp relief by his daily experience in the financial sector of the city. His attraction for the “grimy” Sandringham could be seen as an expression of rebellion against the formalities imposed by the well-organised ‘sanitised’ drinking establishments built to service the banking fraternity near to where he worked in the city. He saw the plywood and milk crates and this signalled a place without pretension, an honest place not made of “chrome and wood”. These materials speak to him of expensive renovations and the interior of Sandringham had not been changed since it was built, it seemed to him. His identification of the milk-crates and plywood as indicative of a non-gentrified space rides with his perception of the venue as “welcoming”. Hyland sets the Sandringham as an oppositional space, and the following exchange points to the personal politics at play in relation to his interactions at the site.
Ree: We’ve always had day jobs mate. Mark’s the only person I knew for years who wore a suit to work and Ben, his flat mate, I was the only one that ever saw him in a suit. You know what, you never turned up at the pub in your suit after work, you’d always go home.

Hyland: I did once to get some takeaway from Stevie and he just bagged the fuck out of me. So I think I got it from the Townie (Town Hall hotel) from that point on.

R: People would not believe me when I’d say “no, he wears a suit every day, every day without fail”.

Smyly: So you actually didn’t go to the pub to get your takeaways if you had your suit on because people that you knew would be there.

Hyland: Yeah, I’ll say that, yeah. It’s quite a push polling but I’ll agree to it.

S: Well, no you can disagree.

R: The thing is Mark scrubs up pretty well in a suit you know.

S: I’m sure he does.

H: I had no reason to go there in a suit because I don’t like suits anyway so I’d go in to see a gig, plus I was living one minute and 50 seconds away so I’d go home and get changed and then go to the pub and score (M. Hyland and H. Ree, personal communication, Aug 28, 2008).

In the ‘Community’ chapter, the discussion included notions of the contestability of a unique idea of *communitas* being prevalent at the hotel, with interviewees’ suggested experiences of the ‘open’ ethos being shown as individually experienced and voiced. Group dynamics exposed here replicate findings from research into youth band cultures (Fornas et al., 1995) and conflicts around “individual deviations from the group’s common modes of living” (pg 237) arise. Here the oppositional nature of the site is more firmly set against a perceived mainstream or everyday working world environment. Stevie (Anthony Hayes) serves Hyland, but also delivers some ridicule concerning his mode of dress.

This could be viewed as a community defending its codes of behaviour and Hyland’s response, to get take-away alcohol from another hotel, seems to gel with the “fear of conflict and separation which exists in….gangs” (ibid), and he avoids the conflict by changing his behaviour when in work clothes to avoid perceptions of non-
compliance with the prevailing ethos. For a place that in other ways denied hierarchical distinctions between performers, staff and patrons, this narrative could be seen to deny these processes. However, it could also show an expansion of the ethos, eliciting this response from Stevie in the face of a perceived threat from symbols of an outside and more powerful mainstream. Hyland’s mode of dress is a symbol of the city and the wealth that eventually overtakes the place, and this symbol is in the hands of one of the place’s insiders. The place is marginal and sets itself as such in opposition to the “chrome” hotels of the city and this marginality is firmly telegraphed by the stage materials in the mind of Hyland when he first sees them. He eventually identifies with the place closely. The margins are “more complex than (they) may at first appear” (Hetherington, 1998: 126), and this one offers Hyland a place where he can identify and position his dislike of the mainstream city spaces he inhabits through his daily work. He and Ree were both regular patrons of the hotel and played out their identification with the place through the band McBadybag (discussed in the ‘Songs’ chapter). Although Stevie plays the role of arbiter of the modes of dress and behaviour of the place here, it is important to understand his personality within this interaction as well, his well liked larrikin attitude and his habit of derision as friendly acceptance. Hyland uses the term ‘score’ to describe buying alcohol perhaps alluding to the prevalence of drug consumption within the inner Sydney live music community. The materials used to build the stage signalled a space untouched by the more formal (i.e. suit wearing) surrounds, and these places had become less available to a group of people interested in popular music-making. In Kirsty Lenthal’s view the process of gentrification was happening close by.

Lenthal: It was fancy. You know, I think the thing was that everything was gentrified and I think that, you know, places like Bondi and Paddington had gone from being bohemian run worlds and communities to being gentrified.

Smyly: So this was a last remaining, or one of the remaining inner-city, non-gentrified…?

L: yeah, definitely. That’s where a lot of people…you know, when you look at communities like Surry Hills to this day, there is working class living right next to affluence….and you know (rubs hands together).the friction that comes from that, and the same in Bondi, there’s a real…there’s the backpacker world, with the affluence.
S: yeah. That’s started in Newtown too, hasn’t it. There’s lots of places there now.

L: There’s lots of backpacker’s places in Newtown. But it is, it’s those sorts of communities that are raped for their culture (K. Lenthal, personal communication, July 17 and 23, 2007).

When considering the material that made the stage, using “fancy” to describe such a place may seem at odds with the reality of the state of the Sandringham, but being one of the last un-renovated old hotels in inner Sydney, and being the only one (considering the closure of the Hopetoun hotel at the time) offering live music seven days a week, a more fanciful place would be hard to find. Her language and feelings are strong. The process of gentrification does not ask local people for permission to remodel these older spaces. Her views of the changing demographic are made clear earlier in this thesis. The “affluence” creates conflict with more traditional inhabitants of the place and the culture becomes a commodity to be advertised to world travellers. John Encarnacao also mentioned the “working class” feel of the venue and joined this feeling to the materials that made the stage.

Encarnacao: Look, I loved it, the whole sort of thing. I mean I didn't love setting up the stage with milk crates but there was something kind of really working class or even kind of punk and do-it-yourself about it which was quite attractive about setting up the stage with the milk crates (J. Encarnacao, personal communication, May 27, 2008).

Earlier, Lachlan Dengate had expressed his love for the ritualistic stage building process, but Encarnacao dislikes it. Disliking does not stop him from being attracted to it though, and being an academic who has written on the histories and meanings embedded in punk and rock music production in Australia and overseas (2008a; 2009) his view is set among his personal knowledge. By using the term “working class” he could be referring to conditions of employment or social norms associated with Australian pub culture, but he is more likely using the term to mark the place as part of a lower socio-economic area, managed and inhabited by people with little financial power, and therefore the crates become make-do and an inexpensive solution for stage building. This is just speculation, but it does highlight how specific statements require some back-up, some confirmation from other interviewees with different experiences and individual views of the place particularly when the researcher’s personal knowledge of the interviewees’ life exceeds the limits of the
study. The crates seem to say “working class” to him and to Hyland, but also “punk” and “do-it-yourself”, descriptors used by other interviewees.

Only one interviewee considered the legal consequences for the use of the stolen milk crates. Peter Robinson relayed this short narrative as one of the features of the place that set it as unique among inner Sydney venues in his view.

Robinson: ...(A)nd then I found out also that the Milk Board found out and basically raided them for having the milk crates because it was illegal and when they found out that they had so many of them, I don’t know, the fine was such an incredible fine. I can’t remember it could be as much as $20, $30, $50 a milk crate and the Sando had that whole room stacked with them (P. Robinson, personal communication, Nov 2, 2007).

No one else who was asked or who talked about the crates mentioned any intervention by the Dairy Farmers’ Corporation, and I could not confirm this story with any of the other people I spoke with about the venue. Nadia Rangan saw the stage as just part of the general look and feel of the place. Being a patron, she was never asked to build or help build the structure, but being one of the last interviewees for this project I asked specifically about the stage because so many of the others interviewed had mentioned it.

Rangan: But gee, the whole thing, I mean the toilets were crappy. The whole place was just a bit of a shambles so I guess I would have taken the stage as “oh well, that’s just how it is here” (N. Rangan, personal communication, May 23, 2008).

The materials that constituted the stage were, for her, indivisible from the rest of the architectural structure. Being that the crates and plywood were a daily addition to the internal arrangement of the space, deconstructable and makeshift, her view projects that same aesthetic value onto the whole site. Toilets, bar, the daily shift of groups of music-makers are seen as similar to the stage, movable, not permanent, as transitory as the sounds emanating from the stage each night. The materials on their own held no special significance for her.
Conclusion

A “fleshing out of ‘what happened’” (DeNora, 2003: 74, 75) through an analysis of the use of the stolen crates and the plywood “puzzle” has shown a unique pub rock culture, but one planted in a history of music-making in inner Sydney. Aspects of the stage’s position, the ritual of its building and un-building, and the physical materials themselves expose a cultural milieu previously hidden. The position of the stage at the Sandringham provided access to the performances in a way not offered at other venues. Audiences felt they could reach into performances and performers felt they could reach an audience due to the proximity of the stage to the bar, the central square bar being the dominant structure in the small room. This broke down the usual boundary between performers and audiences offering a space with “no divide” (S. Miller, personal communication, Nov 7, 2007). The proximity of the stage to the street opened the space to the outside contributing to a ‘street’ feel, and allowed easy access to live performances for people usually restricted from entering the hotel.

A unique auditory phenomenon, a slap-back sonic reflection from the hard tiles of the bar provided the performers with a simple fold-back system, and this made the stage a good performative environment even though the general look and feel of the place was not of a well appointed venue. The bar occupied an area people were less inclined to inhabit at other venues making the room seem less empty on quieter nights. The bar staff were also drawn into the performances by being in full view, becoming part of the visual scope of patrons watching performances. In the view of one performer, the low stage in the small space sums the factors adequately, however, the interactions of both performers and audience members, legal and underage visitors, and drinkers and non-drinkers were heavily influenced by the positioning of the makeshift stage. The position of the stage was seen as “a mistake” by one interviewee and compared with the bars on Fitzroy’s Brunswick Street in Melbourne. Two interviewees made specific mention of this similarity, and the ‘street’ feel engendered by the stage’s proximity to the footpath. The decision to put the stage where it was, was originally determined by the position of the bands prior to a stage being built.
People identified with the place closely, and the solidarity expressed by interviewees was partly built by their shared experience of participation in the ritual practice of building the stage each day. This ritual was not formally instituted for reasons of social cohesion or control, but provided a simple solution for facilitating the nightly live music-making. Musicians expressed a sense of ownership of the place and this was attributed to the hands-on building process. Their connection to and identification with the place was enhanced by the physical (and in part, mental) exertions in constructing the platform from which the performance took place.

Robust and portable materials made the process performative and being a site that supported various styles and genres of music-making, the actions of building were subject to the same individualities displayed in the live musical performances. Being required to complete the process, despite any personal pretensions, had the effect of bringing all participants into a state of equanimity with the prevailing culture. It was seen by some as an initiation rite essential for outsiders to experience, but also by some as a mark of achievement, the meaning of which was a feeling of having been accepted into the culture that promoted and supported live music-making.

Insider knowledge was invested in the building process, and this knowledge was held by those considered closely identified with the place, but also passed freely to those who passed through. A seemingly simple construction had small idiosyncrasies and without specific knowledge the structure could be made unstable and therefore performances could be compromised. Confused or bewildered stage building attempts were subject to ridicule by the regular patrons, many of whom were musicians who held this insider knowledge, and the derision sits as contrary to the expressed feelings of those closely identified with the site as a place of supportive solidarity. This wedds the place to Hetherington’s (1998: 93) discussion of the operations of a ‘Bund’, however the centrality missing from the group collective identification is provided here in the form of the architectural components. The repetitious use of the components and the seeming simplicity of their functionality seat their form firmly in the minds of those who invest effort in maintaining the music-making at the site.
Materials that constituted the stage were illegally collected and roughly constructed, mirroring aspects of the site itself, being a place that negotiated a complex set of relationships with relevant legal requirements, and had poorly maintained infrastructure. Meanings attached to the materials by those who identified with the site marked the place as un-gentrified and authentic, somewhat of an anachronism in a city where many of the opportunities for live music-making had disappeared, and where older architecture was being cleared for the construction of more salubrious surrounds. Interviewees ascribed value to the materials, expressed in the term “working class”, and this could be seen as synonymous with the lack of pretension others felt the process of building the stage promoted.

It must be acknowledged that “an emphasis on the disruptive effects of economic reordering will result in the valorization of musical practices perceived to be rooted in geographical, historical and cultural unities which are stable and conflated” (Straw, 1991b: 369). However, the makeshift nature of the materials mirrored the makeshift artistic movements that flowed through the place, and the physical reality of these materials, coupled with the investment of ritual symbolism by the people who used the place, meant this stage was an important artefact in the history of the live music-making processes that emanated from the site.
Chapter Four

Songs of the Sando – “Go there purely for music, I’m not a pub person”

It is clear the reason some people frequented the Sandringham was not to experience the feeling of community or the ritual participation offered by the place, but, as the quote above suggests, they went “purely for music” (P. Robinson, personal communication, Nov 2, 2007). Because music-making was the focus of the seven-nights-a-week venue this chapter looks to uncover something of the culture of music-making that formed at the place through analysis of songs that were composed, recorded and released by bands whose members frequented the site. In the past chapters I have been looking at the interview narratives recorded for the study and analysing ideas brought up in these to find a sense of the place and of the time. Here I want to look at some of the songs from CDs released by bands that identified with the place to see if this same sense can be found in them. The Sandringham hotel became the site for the formation of several nationally and internationally touring rock bands, The Whitlams, Frenzal Rhomb and The Gadflys among them. Stylistically, these three bands pursue (or pursued in the Gadflys’ case) very different musical strategies and sounds. My look at the various sonic representations of various musical collaborations is motivated by personal enthusiasm, but also by ideas other academics have had on ways to study music-making cultures.

We should welcome this multiplicity of musical experiencings, interfused overlappingly with thought, embodied affect, and personal creativity. Their study is not easy, for they can only emerge through sensitive critical attention to ethnographic specificities with all their complications of multiple groups, roles, outlooks, senses, artefacts and individuals – and without doubt, their controversial interpretations too. But widening the analysis of music to include such issues lays the foundation for both a more realistic appreciation of music and a richer model of human beings and human culture (Finnegan, 2003: 191).
When paying attention to songs, they emerge as artefacts of the place based culture, even though few songs have specifically mentioned the site by name. For the majority of its approximately 18 years as a principally music-centred venue the site provided a meeting point for musicians, and many musicians worked at the place, providing a unique social and economic node focussed on music-making. The influence of the musicians’ social, economic and creative interactions through the space made available at the Sandringham can be seen in the creative output of songs on CDs released at the time. Despite the strong output of these creative artefacts from bands associated with the site, no assessment of the material from this creative flow has been undertaken. Also no site specific survey of songs has been done for any popular music-making venue, and this one itself remains brief. As stated previously, perhaps this is because the vast majority of the songs were not written specifically about the place with no specific naming of the hotel or its characters (except in one instance and ignoring McBodybag’s output), but I am looking for some trace of the space that remains in the circumstances of the production of these cultural artefacts, as well as inside the sound of the songs from this productive period in the Sandringham’s life as a venue.

In the following pages, I focus on five songs from five different groups (or songwriters) and discuss the lyrics, timbre and some musical elements of these songs, as well as anecdotal evidence from interviews and my experience of the performance of the songs or the bands that performed them. The aim is to better understand the ways in which musicians and music-making supporters build creative output and present it in an urban location and to see if the place can be seen through the song.

I also want to conduct a brief philosophical discussion about whether the performance of one particular song, ‘Closing Time’ by Bow Campbell, opens a space where the patrons of the hotel can join more fully with the performers. This was the last song performed on the stage at the Sandringham and was considered by some interviewees to be an anthem of the place. Through writings by cultural theorists and human geographers, I survey some ideas on the meanings of the terms ‘space’ and ‘place’, and posit a more transcendent view of what happened in the venue when ‘Closing Time’ was performed.
This view inside some of the songs that were often played at the site is being informed by an understanding that “critical reflexivity with an intimate knowledge of fan discourse” (Bennett, 2002: 462) can assist in bringing out information and markers of culture that have previously been ignored, while tempering the insider enthusiasm driving the research. Although individual songwriters were asked about the writing of the original work, I am considering the songs “multiauthored texts” (Middleton, 2006: 72) in performance, them having been performed and recorded by groups, and performed on the unique Sandringham stage where the audience and bar staff were drawn into the experience of the performance by the architectural space. Considering also that “music and space are actively and dialectically related” (Connell & Gibson, 2003: 192), looking more closely, almost through the frame of particular songs, I aim to show how this music encapsulated the space, and played a part in joining people, place, culture and time in that space.

The discussion will follow several lines of investigation to identify aspects within, or around the song. These lines look to expose what could be called pathways (Finnegan, 1989) through the place, but also evocations of the space opened by the performance of the song at that place. The lines of investigation follow social, musicological, ethnographic, literary, and psychological points of view, and are underpinned by the privilege offered by my ‘insider’ status as the researcher. I will begin by discussing some interview narratives with songwriters, and then move on to look more closely at specific songs.

**Asking Songwriters**

As part of the interview process I asked songwriters if they had written about the pub. Influences for creative output come from various directions and in a multitude of ways, and although Bernie Hayes, the musician most identified with the site in the minds of those interviewed, has not written a song specifically about the site, it is difficult to imagine the site not having had an influence on his musicality and performance ethic.
Hayes: No but … you mentioned that on the phone … I don’t think I did. I wrote songs when I was living behind the pub at The Sando in Station Street but I don’t think they were particularly about The Sando (B. Hayes and J. Richardson, personal communication, Aug 16, 2007).

This was a brief answer to a question I hoped would elicit more specific information about Hayes’ songwriting. It is interesting to note how Hayes now performs in relation to the performance ethic he developed at the Sandringham across the many years he played there in the Shout Brothers and with the Gruesome Twosome. His regular Wednesday gig at the Rose of Australia hotel (at the time of writing on hiatus) is run similarly to the Tuesday gig he regularly performed, first with the Gruesome Twosome, and after Stevie’s death, with invited guests. The format of originals mixed with an eclectic mix of cover versions remains his same when he plays solo. Influence for his creative output earlier in the late 1980s could be seen in his decision to live just across the rear lane from the hotel, positioning the place “like an extension of the lounge room, across the alley way into the Sando and back again” (Anonymous, personal communication, Oct 28, 2007).

This geographic proximity between home space and performance space made the logistical concerns usually associated with getting to and from gigs in a densely populated urban area disappear. However, it is not possible to speculate whether this proximity could be seen in Hayes’ creative productions. It could be understood that minimising an artist’s non-creative concerns would have a positive effect on creative outputs but any universalities mapped onto individual’s aesthetic practices remain problematic due to the wide diversity of artists and artistic practice. In an effort to find a more specific answer to this I asked Hayes directly about the Sandringham’s influence on his work.

Q: Do you think it had an influence on your musical work? Do you think it influenced the way you approached song writing or anything like that?

B: No, not really. I certainly saw a lot of bands that I thought were great and surely that influences you but I don’t know if it was in a specific way (B. Hayes and J. Richardson, personal communication, Aug 16, 2007).

Apart from experiencing many performances from many bands over the years, Hayes again dismisses the idea of specific influences. Yet when interviewing Nic Dalton
who played in bands with Hayes when they both had moved from Canberra with Secret Seven in the early 1980s, he relayed his thoughts and memories of ‘discovering’ Hayes as a singer/songwriter, even after many years of personal familiarity.

Dalton: I suppose The Gruesome Twosome Tuesday nights were always good. Actually seeing, after Stevie died, Bernie was up there playing by himself one night and he launched into Boyfriend’s Back in Town and I went “wow, is this an Everley Brothers hit I must have missed” or “what ‘60’s classic’s this?” and I said Bernie “what was that song you played, that boyfriend one?” and he goes “that’s one of mine” and that’s when I thought I wanted to release Bernie. That was the whole catalyst for me putting together the ‘Every Tuesday’ album was that one song basically because Bernie was always the older brother of Stevie and we always thought Bernie was a bit daggy and his songs were daggy and not as good as our songs but it wasn’t until really … I mean, I’d always heard his songs and liked some of them but he wasn’t me and Stevie, we were the cool ones, he was the older brother. I’m not saying he’s not cool because he is but it was hearing that song on one Tuesday night and I thought “wow” and then it all came and I thought “Bernie should do a solo album” and he’d never thought about it really and no-one had ever thought about it. So it all came from that one song.

Smyly: Has it been successful?
D: Oh definitely, yeah, yeah.
S: His records sell well?
D: His first one sold probably 4,000 copies.
S: Wow! (N. Dalton, personal communication, Sept 7, 2007)

For the independent record label Half A Cow, Dalton suggested an average number of sales would be “200 or 17” (ibid) in other circumstances, so sales of 4000 are considered in these terms highly successful. Interestingly, Hayes does not see the Sandringham Hotel as influential in the inception of what could arguably be the most important aspect of his creative output, that of his solo work and of his following CDs with the Bernie Hayes Quartet. The site made possible the circumstances that allowed his original material to be viewed in a new light, distanced somewhat from his association with the Shout Brothers who concentrated on delivering cover versions of a mix of indie and classic rock songs for their religiously attended Sunday night residency. The Shout Brothers did release two albums of original material, one prior to Stevie’s death, so Dalton in his role as mixer for the Shout Brothers’ gigs could have been aware of these original songs prior to the gig.
he speaks of. The circumstances and effect of Stevie Plunder’s (Anthony Hayes’) death cannot be underestimated here, or on all the interviewees for this study. Each person mentioned this tragic event as a pivotal moment in their engagement with the site. It could be possible that the vibrant performance aesthetic of Stevie (see Figure 7) overshadowed the more reserved delivery of Bernie, or that Dalton had transferred his deep appreciation and the feelings of camaraderie he had built for many years.
with Stevie onto Bernie. What emerges from the story is the Sandringham as a place where Hayes could present his well crafted original material to a musically supportive and music industry aware cohort, and this led to his emergence as a songwriter with a nationally recognised profile, having received solid national airplay with his first solo album *Every Tuesday, Sometimes Sunday* (Hayes, 1999). Incidentally, the album’s title is a direct reference to the residencies Hayes performed at the Sandringham. ‘Influence’ also emerges as a concept with more nuances than some performers consider, it would seem.

Genevieve Maynard was more direct when asked about songs of the place, and expressed a view where the architecture of the site becomes visible.

> Maynard: Did I write songs about the pub? Not specifically. I remember I had a line in a song that referred to looking out a window and in my mind, even though I hadn’t written it about the Sando, in my mind it always reminded me that line of being on stage and looking out through the glass door where you could see onto the street. I must have written it in the era when I was playing at the Sando a lot but no, I have no songs about pubs (G. Maynard, personal communication, Oct 2, 2008).

Influence here comes from Maynard’s memories of performing on the stage at the Sandringham. Architecturally, the pub was particular in that it had only one wall where light could enter the space. This was the eastern wall, and other interviewees talked about how the light operated in the space. Despite descriptions of the place as rundown, Julia Richardson another songwriter remembered the play of light in the space.

> Richardson: I remember that the Shouties played six to ten on Sunday nights, I think. People would start gathering from about three. It was always quite pleasant from about three and you’d sit there and there’d be that afternoon sunlight and the beers, all the different shades of the beers and the sun would come in and you’d see sort of walnut brown and copper brown and everything (B. Hayes and J. Richardson, personal communication, Aug 16, 2007).

Maynard dismisses the idea of a song about “pubs”, and through the context of our previous conversations, I can understand her view of the Australian hotel as a place steeped in a social history of dominant masculinity. As one of the few (but far from only) gay women to be an active and successful participant in the inner Sydney rock
music scene, her awareness of the “masculine Australian traditions” (Homan, 2003a: 17) of pub rock culture could be understood to be more acute than mine, identifying as a heterosexual male, and therefore seemingly aligned with the historically dominant demographic. The idea of a song about a pub is anathema for her, but the feeling of the space offered for musical performance at the Sandringham makes itself present in her memory when she creates a song. Julia Richardson finds some beauty in the rundown space too, some allusion to the lotus blooming in the mud seems apt, and this idea reappears in my discussion of songs further along. One songwriter interviewee found that his time of maximum songwriting activity did not coincide with his time of greatest activity at the site.

Encarnacao: No, I don't think so but probably should bear in mind '93 to '98 which is when I was really involved with the Sando, when I was part of that community. Look, it gets into personal ... well not personal but I know it's not about me but if I didn't write a song about the Sando I don't know if that's the sort of thing I would have done anyway but also '93 to '98 was a period of time where I wasn't writing songs. Well, much less than any other time of my adult life.

Smyly: Just because of Shaggin' Wagon maybe?

E: Because of my experience with Upsidaisium that broke up at the end of '94 I felt really disillusioned with doing original material and then I funnelled all that sort of energy into doing the experimental improvised stuff with St. Crustacean and Pi and Scuffy. So me and Meredith wrote all the songs for Scuffy. The other projects I was doing were improvised. It was really only in 2000 that I started writing songs again.

Much like Maynard’s view of songs about pubs, Encarnacao does not see writing a song about the hotel as something he would do. Beyond the personal predilection for song subject matter Encarnacao is offered space to explore his improvisatory musical practice. As mentioned in the chapter on ‘community’, he organised a day of experimental art music performances, something no other inner Sydney venue had offered (or considered in my experience). Again the place becomes influential in its openness to non-mainstream composition idioms, but less so as a site about which songs could be written. When considering the Sandringham as the subject of songs, Nic Dalton considered the social interactions of the site worthy of mention.
Dalton: Yeah, I wrote a great song called ‘From One Skank to Another’ and emailed the words to Tom (Morgan) and he emailed back and said “that’s great, that’s great” and I didn’t save a copy of it and he deleted it so…

Smyly: It’s gone.

D: It’s gone but it was really good lyrics about a guy that goes to The Sando and gets drunk and picks up a girl and there’s about five of them that we pictured, five guys that we all know. I won’t mention any names except Gareth.

S: (laughs)

D: I won’t include myself because I wasn’t writing it about me because it wasn’t actually me but we were picturing just a guy that goes to The Sando and it was really good and it was really sad, it really fitted in with a lot of our other Sneeze songs and then when I tried to recreate it, you can’t rewrite something because it was really simple and the flow of the words was really good. Another song which was on a Sneeze album was called ‘You’ve Never Had Sex Sober’ and I’ve always pictured that the guy picks up the girl at The Sando and he’s always drunk and every time he has a root, he’s always drunk, he’s never had sex sober and that was another sad one too but it’s also funny but I always picture that person (N. Dalton, personal communication, Sept 7, 2007).

Social interactions and sexual behaviour at the site become the influence for Dalton and he expresses his view of this through lyric content. He is keen to distance himself from these behaviours and this could be due to our conducting the interview within ear shot of his partner. They have a small child and share a house so I can understand the willingness not to glorify past sexual histories in these circumstances, but his knowledge of, and time at the site would be an informative factor for the song. With the space being small it was difficult not to be noticed when sexually motivated actions were being instigated. It is difficult to gauge whether or not Dalton’s misogynistic use of the word “skank” was ironic in the context of the forgotten lyrics. He qualifies the behaviour later in the quote as “sad” but also “funny”, coupled with the remembered title being amended for the song that was performed by Sneeze, would confirm this.

The motivation to write a song like this does mark the Sandringham as a place where alcohol consumption provided a space where sexual interactions could be initiated and pursued, not dissimilar to other socially interactive sites offering alcohol and music. However, with the small size of the venue and the plethora of musicians frequenting the site, the behaviours of individuals (as mentioned by Dalton) were on
full display and could be documented and questioned through creative means. These
critical views could then be presented back to the community gathered there through
performance, offering a social reflexivity undocumented elsewhere.

I will move to discuss specific songs now, beginning with one song that was recalled
by many of the interviewees, particularly in relation to the closing of the site and
more specifically the celebrations of the last night.

‘Closing Time’ – B. Campbell

The lyrics to the song, written by Bowden Campbell, are as follows:

I’m not permitted by law
To serve you beer anymore
‘Cause it’s half-past ten now
Please find your way to the door
(refrain) You don’t have to go home
But you can’t stay here

I’ve been asking you nicely
For his party to stop
Now I’m telling you plainly
Won’t you all please fuck off
(refrain)

Will you please go on stumbling
Where you’re stumbling to
There’s a bar up the road
And it’s full of people just like you
(refrain) (x3)

Above are the lyrics to a song written by a musician who was also a barperson at the
Sandringham Hotel. When the venue closed its doors in October 1998 this was the
last song performed, played by a makeshift band that included Campbell himself, as
well as Bernie Hayes and others (see Figure 9). On that occasion, most of the
audience sang along. Campbell wrote ‘Closing Time’ about a year earlier, for the
'Sweet 16' birthday celebrations held at the Sandringham Hotel across the months of September and October 1997, but more specifically for a gig on 13th October, 1997. The band that performed the song on the ‘Sweet 16’ night was made up of staff members and named “The Staffies”, a term used to describe the free drinks the staff were offered after each shift. It could be said that the song fits within a broad category of balladry; songs about specific events, even if this event, the closing process, took place every day. We might say that to hear this song in a pub in Australia is understandable because “pub rock…is deeply influenced by the Australian ballad tradition” (Stratton, 2004: 29). In a broader musicological view, the song sits on a refrain, “You don’t have to go home……”, placing it among the long British poetry tradition of folk songs written in this way according to Peter Van Der Merwe (1989).

In a more philosophical view the refrain, the repetition, is interesting in that it could be seen to both defy death in that “ceasing to repeat is to die” (Middleton, 2006: 137), and to represent a death in that hearing the line for a second time “extinguishes the original” (ibid). In an analysis of repetition in popular music, Middleton invokes Lacan in seeing repetition as the “victory of the species over the individual” (ibid), and this is true for ‘Closing Time’ if seen through the social context of the circumstances of the song’s writing and first performance. The song was written by an individual songwriter, but with a particular performance, a particular collective event in mind. Campbell knew who would be performing with him in this one-off event, and he was also personally familiar with the closing procedures being one of the site’s staff. Moreover, he shared this closing process, this nightly ritual of moving people along, with the people he would be performing this song with. The song was not by him and for him alone. It was for the community of that place and, as Middleton argues is one of the implicit meanings of repetition, it was written for the species (or the collective) not the individual.

The refrain has the effect, of joining us to the song in that a refrain is easy to remember and to repeat, and also has the effect of joining us to the musician who sings the song, and to the people around us as we join in singing. Much like ‘Waltzing Matilda’ and perhaps John Williamson’s ‘Give Me a Home Among the Gum Trees’, we can connect with those around us on these repeated lines. The
melody is simple; Do Re Me Fa Re in solfa, making it memorisable after one or two listens, and joining in is then a question of the level to which you are immersed in the situation, not one of musical skill or mastery of singing. Singing together connects us by voice. This experience of connection echoes through our memory of the sociability of this place, stimulated by the repetition and our participation in the repetition. Repetition also marks time and more so some argue there is a unique experience of time being offered through immersion in music (Frith, 1996b). Frith names both Igor Stravinsky and John Blacking as supporters of the notion that “music…allows us to stop time, while we consider how it passes” (pg 149). By calling the song ‘Closing Time’ Campbell has subconsciously invoked this notion. Performances of the song collected people together in their identification with the place as they sung along together. The place has now gone but the song remains and current performances of it bring back this time, remembered fondly by those interviewed. In a way it closes time, the present, and allows us to see a little of the time when it was performed in the venue. Interviewees have recalled the song. Suzie Bower said, “You know when the Sando closed at eleven, and they’d sing that song (singing) ‘You don’t have to go home, but you can’t stay here…”’ (S. Bower and J. Lowe, personal communication, May 30, 2007). Her memory is strong after 10 years, and there is no recording of the song. This song, above others influenced by the site, provided a meeting point for the community that formed and maintained the culture that prevailed at the Sandringham.

‘Closing Time’ is not the most recognised of songs identified as being Sandringham based. Perhaps the most recognised song, from one of the most recognised musicians who frequented the place, is “God drinks at the Sando”, initially a poem by Justin Lowe set to music by Tim Freedman and released on the The Whitlams’ Love this City album (1999). Lowe’s poem carries the premise that in a quiet, forgotten corner of an unremarkable, unlovely pub the beauty of the world manifests. ‘Closing Time’, itself is a simple and beautiful song, and this concept, like the lotus blooming from the mud, has universal appeal. It consists of three chords (Gmaj, Cmaj and Dmaj) and its chord structure is available to even the most rudimentary guitar player. Like the site itself at the time, it gives the impression of the place where the doors to the street and the stage are open to almost anybody. There were no dress codes or door
charges. These are impressions only however, and the reality of the song and the place are more complex.

Suzie Bower, recalling one afternoon in the Sandringham said in an interview,

> Bower: there was about five dogs and about three punters, all hanging about, and you know Jace (the pub dog – see Figure 8) was there, and the Cops went by and we went quick quick quick so we herded all the dogs behind the bar (everyone laughs) (S. Bower and J. Lowe, personal communication, May 30, 2007).

The opening line of the song sets the place of engagement in relation to an idea of ‘law’. This positions the singer to some degree outside the law, an outlaw, a position from which much of rock’s narratives are set. The unspoken line here could be construed as “I’d like to serve you more beer, and I have in the past, but understand my position….”. During my time working behind the bar at the Sandringham, the time when this song was written, the state government introduced its “No more, it’s the Law” campaign, highlighting the laws pertaining to the responsible serving of alcohol and staff meetings were called to disseminate the new regulations to the Sandringham staff.

The lyrics begin in a polite tone, a tone becoming a barkeep concerned with his/her patron’s wellbeing. “Please find your way to the door”, speaks with a gentle voice, but like the process of inebriation itself the veneer of respectability fades by the second verse. The open and welcoming attitude of the first impressions are more complex now. In my experience as a staff member it was common for expletives to be used, delivered in raised voice, to move patrons out of the venue after ‘big’ nights.

Another more threatening staff behaviour was to use “the pacifier behind the bar, I think it was a baseball bat” (S. Miller, personal communication, Nov 7, 2007), to smack on the top of the bar to gain patron’s attention while the commands were shouted. Many complained, but others saw this as a sign of the familiarity the bar exuded, an example of the Australian ‘trait’ of friendly derision. “You can’t stay here” is firm and leaves no room for argument.
Figure 8 – Jason (or JC), the pub dog. He lived in the hotel day and night. After dying Jason was cremated and his ashes tattooed into a regular patron’s arm.
By the third verse the reality of the effects of alcohol are plainly acknowledged. The openness of wherever “you’re stumbling to” is at odds with the assumption of other bars “full of people just like you”. The legal directives for the responsible serving of alcohol are acknowledged to have been ignored by now and this last “just like you” could be seen to separate the singer and listener again, and brings into question the refrainic connectedness I spoke of earlier. Again, the complexities of the social order of the venue are highlighted with what seems to be an open acceptance of equanimity turning along familiar dividing lines. “People just like you”, are seemingly not nice people, just drunk people who do not like home, who are avoiding the stability and security the home represents. We were together for a time, and now we must separate. You thought the relationship was equal when we sang together, but it was economic and you were paying. It is undeniable and ubiquitous. It happens everywhere and every night.
This song speaks of some of the narratives that permeated the Sandringham Hotel at the time I was closely connected to the site. In the interests of open research I need to declare I collaborated with the Bow Campbell, the songwriter, in the The Impossibles, and played on an album for his principal band ‘Front End Loader’. We worked shifts behind the bar together, toured and socialised together. We shared some life in that space. Perhaps this exposes the real challenge of offering an objective voice when discussing this particular song in this study. In whatever way that affects this discussion it is the space the song itself offers I am interested in finding (or dismissing if that is the case), and the relationship between the song space and the space at the Sandringham. There is an opportunity here to look more closely at the nomenclature of the terms ‘space’ and ‘place’, to see if these are appropriate when discussing participation in the shared enjoyment of music-making. Maybe there are more useful or more definite ideas that are useful here.

**In Space or Place?**

It is interesting to see academic discourse concerned with understanding the phenomenon of people coming together to experience participatory actions and the way these participants move from a socially expressed individuation to inhabit a collective emotionally vibrant space. John Agnew (1993) identifies ‘space’ as referring to “the presumed effect of location, or where social processes are taking place” upon those social processes (pg 251). Mike Crang (1998) discusses the choice of either ‘space’ or ‘place’ for cultural theorists as being between a nomothetic approach, based on quantitative research, and an idiographic approach, that “describes the specifics of places” (pg 101) and looks for “what makes places individual”. The ‘place’ here carries ideas of belonging and also carries a set of “cultural characteristics” (1998: 101). An anthem marks the belonging to place in a sonic ritual, and the singing together becomes a cultural characteristic. The increased speed of our society, our ability to get from place to place in shorter time has led to a sense of ‘placelessness’ and this has led directly to a perceived dominance of ‘space’ (and a somewhat overbearing dominance) in Crang’s view. However this quantifiably demarcated ‘space’ is not the song space I was looking for.
Since Descartes, Edward S. Casey argues, ‘space’ has dominated ‘place’, and says that philosophy and geography need each other when questions of ‘space’ and ‘place’ arise. “This has been evident ever since the appearance of Yi-Fi Tuan’s Space and Place just over twenty years ago” (Casey, 2001: 403), Casey writes, and he attributes a resetting of the priorities to Tuan’s book. Previously, ‘place’ was set undeniably within ‘space’, and relied on this idea of ‘space’ for its existence. Tuan questioned this by putting the “stress on the experiential features of place, its ‘subjective’ or ‘lived’ aspects”, (ibid) Casey explains.

In her look at trancing across different cultures, but particularly in Balinese ritual practices, Judith Becker posits a habitus of listening as the space in which several, almost scripted actions take place when people gather to make music. “Within each of these scripts, musical, behavioural, and emotional events will occur within a certain predictable frame” (Becker, 2004: 85), however at the same time each of these events will be “unique and unrepeatable” (ibid). Further to this Becker says the emotions brought up in this habitus of listening “are private and public, interior and exterior, individual and communal” (ibid). This could be the space that opens when ‘Closing Time’ is sung communally. The events are scripted and predictable with relation to the playing and singing of the song, and also with relation to the nightly closing of the bar and moving along of people. To describe the song as ‘emotional’ is pushing to far in this philosophical shift, but the emotions associated with camaraderie and togetherness elicited through group singing could speak for a habitus of listening. The feelings are personal but also shared, and in that the song became almost an anthem of the place, communal. In these terms this is an identified space that becomes available when the song is performed.

This is a cursory look at what constitutes deep discussions around the issue, which includes issues of music and place, geo-politicisations of space, and community formations of music-making sub-cultures. Gibson and Connell (2003) discuss how identity is formed in places through music. Stafford (2004) documents the political and societal changes of a specific city across time, while Finnegan (1989) offers an insider view on music-making in a specific place at a specific time. Writings and research about this issue emanate from sociology, cultural anthropology and human geography departments rather than from music faculties, but this may be due to the
smaller number of music facilities compared with the collected others. It does remind us of the ubiquity of music in general and how there are still many areas of music production and consumption yet to be studied. Because this thesis is being written from a music department, and by a music graduate, it argues for a more philosophical view of ‘space’, one that incorporates songs, people, place, time, modes of action, physical materials, memory and history, lost in the past but opened through the song. The ‘space’ I am looking for reminds me of the ‘space’ Sun Ra came from (Toop, 1995: 23) the space that offered each human the right to be as they are at the time.

Space in my view and particularly with regard to ‘Closing Time’, is a complex mix of action and psychology where the freedom to participate on a bodily level sits with an opening of a mind connecting through repetition, in time. The repetition, as Middleton suggests, not only cheats death but brings with death the certainty of “the victory of the species” (Middleton, 2006: 137). By opening this possibility of longevity, this view to a continuing future it allows the participants to see outside the time. Moment and memory mix in music and the culture of the place replicates itself in space.

In a recent newspaper article Sunanda Creagh described the Sandringham Hotel as “a sacred site of Sydney’s live music scene” (Creagh, 2007: 7). The use of the term ‘sacred site’ is interesting here. It takes an English translation of a concept closely tied to an ancient system of relationship to environment and uses it to elevate the Sandringham Hotel to an almost spiritual level in relation to the sub-culture of music-making in urban Sydney. I’ll look at one Aboriginal Nation’s concept of relationship with their environment a little later. In many of the interviews conducted for my thesis however, people refer to the Sandringham as “overlooked” or even “ignored”. Like countless Australian Aboriginal sacred sites that have been ignored and built upon, the Sandringham was gutted and remodelled, stripped of its former internal architecture and its people dispersed.

Looking at the lyrics, specifically in the chorus of ‘Closing Time’, Campbell confirms our unwillingness to settle at home, in our established place (“you don’t have to go home”), but reminds us of the impermanence of our current place (“but you can’t stay here”). He could be suggesting that you cannot stay here because it
will be torn down, you will be moved along, and there will be new things built here that hold no memory of the past, and in a mirror of the interactions between white and black Australians, of the terror of the forced evictions (do not dare mention massacres). The song is letting us see the politics of an Australian space.

Campbell has written other potent political songs with nationally significant impetus for his hard rock band Front End Loader. ‘4 Star Heritage Arsehole’ from the band’s third album *Last of the V8 Interceptors* (1997) criticises the then Minister of Defence Brendan Nelson’s insensitive decision to arrive at an air show in a Black Hawk helicopter a few weeks after a crash of two Black Hawks near Townsville killed 18 servicemen. The second verse of this song criticises the way Aboriginal protests were ignored when a decision was taken to begin uranium mining in a culturally sensitive area of the Northern Territory. ‘Sorry Day’ from the band’s fourth album *How Can We Fail When We’re So Sincere?* (2001) describes the social conditions experienced by Aboriginal Australians, and was written in direct response to the then Prime Minister John Howard’s refusal to apologise for past governmental policies of assimilation as documented in the “Bringing Then Home” report into the forced removal of children of Aboriginal parentage. We can see from this Campbell is concerned with indigenous rights issues and the politics of place on a national level. If we are looking at this song (‘Closing Time’) by a white urban songwriter as a mark of this urban place (the Sandringham), we could look to indigenous places where art becomes space, where a mark transforms from symbol to something deeper, to see if Campbell is tapping into a more traditional cultural narrative. Jennifer Biddle (2007) found that to the desert aboriginal Warlpiri people, marks made on the body and on the painted surface were seen as inseparable from the marks of the landscape itself.

*These signs and symbols are called ‘kuruwarri’ in Warlpiri – a complex term meaning mark, trace, ancestral presence and/or essence, cicatrice, birthmark and/or freckle* (pg 56).

The *kuruwarri* are not symbolic of the landscape, they are indivisible from it, being the manifestations of the imprints generations have made on the land, and the land has made in return. In fact, any deeper understanding of this is marred by my
experience. To contemplate this direct relationship between art and place as original and enduring is anathema to modern life in this city, this ‘knock-it-down-and-forget-the-past’, remarkable, re-make-able society.

Simon Frith (1996a) points out that lyrics have to be treated “in terms of the persuasive relationship set up between singer and audience” (pg 120). The lyrics of ‘Closing Time’, having been written for a celebration of 16 years of music at this venue could be seen as a collective acknowledgement of the culture that permeates the place itself. The relationship between the staff, as performers of the song in the band ‘Staffies’, and the audience as equal participants in the birthday celebration, builds an active sense of equanimity, through the repetition of the refrain. The song is simple and we are all invited to join. The bar staff/drinker, band/audience dichotomies are also called into question by the architectural space, with the stage on the bar and a band of staff members. It was written for the site’s birthday, and the site holds the people equally, whatever their role.

In the interview with Kirsty Lenthal, quoted in the ‘Stage’ chapter, we discussed the effect the central bar had on breaking down these barriers between the perceived levels of engagement at the site.

Lenthal: Well the semi-circle of fear, the semi-circle of fear was the bar. So…
Smyly: Just explain the semi-circle of fear.
L: Well, you know how people go and see bands and they don’t stand at the front? No-one will ever stand at the front. And they create that semi-circle, so that’s a semi-circle of fear. There’ll always be one goon in the middle dancing or doing something. I dubbed the bar there the semi-circle of fear, because…
S: Because we took up that space…
L: Yeah, we were the duds in the middle…. (both laugh) (K. Lenthal, personal communication, July 17 and 23, 2007).

The audience and performers are spared the empty front section and the feeling of isolation and emptiness that this brings to a rock music show when there are low numbers of attendees. More importantly, the staff become either the most enthusiastic band supporters by actively occupying this stage front space, or from the audiences point of view, part of the performance itself. Many people’s engagement
with music analysis becomes bounded by the broad categories of ‘serious’ and ‘popular’. ‘Serious’ or European-derived music is approached on aesthetic value, while ‘popular’ or African-derived music is held up, largely in reaction to ‘serious’ aestheticism, by its functionality (Frith, 1996b).

One thing I am attempting here is to uncover the way ‘Closing Time’s’ aesthetic devices encode the song’s use value. By looking not only into its words, its form, its chord structure, but also the value it held to the people who wrote and joined in the singing of the song, a clearer idea of the culture of the Sandringham Hotel, at that time, emerges. Ethnomusicologists do this well in “studies of traditional and folk musics which are explained musically (in terms of their formal and sonic qualities)” (Frith, 1996a: 120), coupled with descriptions of their contextual use, but when sociology looks to uncover social representations in popular music the analysis becomes problematic. Aesthetic judgements that posit ‘good’ music and ‘authentic’ performances cloud our ability to see the way the music makes the rules for these judgements rise initially. ‘True’ music builds its own idea of ‘truth’, Frith argues, and it is our job as researchers to look into how it does this. I am looking to validate this multi-layered approach to ‘Closing Time’. Judith Becker (2004) calls for a more complex analysis, perhaps mirroring Edward S.Casey’s (2001) call for a broader view.

To those who use the traditional models of music cognition, the idea of incorporating a much messier, much more complex, and uncertain model based on biology and phenomenology can seem like a giant step backwards, away from scientific elegance, away from empirical controls, away from universality. Yet we experience music with our skins, with our pulse rates, and with our body temperature (Becker, 2004: 36).

Only by looking into the song, its lyrics, melody and chord structure, and also looking out at its performance, and the people and the time and the place, can the space come into view. I have discussed the song in these ways to see if the place, the time, the situation, the memory, the moment, the history, and the community, coalesced in its performance and in the memory of being involved in its performance. Maybe the vast old spirits in this vast old land speak quietly now to its
young imported children, reminding them of an original engagement with others through songs like ‘Closing Time’, or maybe I just hope for this after having seen a culture I was enthusiastically involved in taken away.

I will now move on to other songs from the place. The songs have been chosen partly due to the diversity of approach each of the artists take in style and performance, but also due to the musicians’ close proximity to the place. Each band had one or more members who worked behind the bar at the venue, as did Bow Campbell, with the exception of Crow, whose members all socialised regularly (if not daily) at the site. Unlike ‘Closing Time’, all the following songs were released on CD, with the exception of McBodybag’s song which was released on cassette. I will begin with the most recognised of the bands associated with the site.
The Ballad of Lester Walker – The Whitlams

Lester Walker wasn’t a great talker
He went to parties but always stood alone
People amused him, he was always looking on
But now our Lester Walker’s gone
Bus rides, highways, looking for a new place
Found a new space and called it home
Seen on beaches making castles in the sand
Being alone was all he’d ever known

Chorus
Well he’s gone, Our Lester’s gone from our home
That’s what his mother cries
He doesn’t even phone to tell her how he is
His room’s the same as when he was just a little boy
I know that he’ll return some day, yeah she knows he will

Three months later in the park he meets a boy named Sid
They talk of all the things they’d do and all the things they did
Everyday they’d sit and meet and talk and watch and laugh
So close a bond yet so innocent, a love was formed
The two of them climb up a hill and in a warm embrace
They watch the sun slowly set behind a mountain range
All they needed was there and then nothing needed to be said
‘Cause nothing can disturb the unconcerned

Interlude:
But then….
In the morning paper Lester reads that Sid is dead
Got stabbed in the park late last night
Lester cries out in pain, runs to the window and releases himself
Now side by side they lie in the mortuary

Chorus
(alt lyric on x2 Chorus)
Oh, yes he’s gone, Our Lester’s gone from our home
She cries and cries
No, he don’t phone no more, she knows where he now lies
His room’s the same as when he was just a little boy
Never to return to his mother’s loving arms

F#m (B/C/C#)
F#m/A/B/D/C#
Chorus: Am/C/D/Dm

This song was written by Stevie Plunder for The Plunderers, the band he formed with Nic Dalton prior to The Whitlams but was released on the Whitlams’ first album *Introducing* (1993). It is in the ballad tradition, telling the story of an ‘outsider’ who finds love and acceptance, only to suicide upon learning of his lover’s violent death. In this it mirrors ‘Closing Time’ in confirming Stratton’s (2004) view of pub rock in the Australian tradition. Several lyrical markers in the song interest me in relation to the Sandringham Hotel and the community of music-makers who socialised there. Stevie Plunder was born Anthony Hayes, one of nine children and his stage name, a pun on ‘Stevie Wonder’, seems to suggest that his attitude was more confrontational than the famous American songwriter’s. Nic Dalton recall the first time he saw Hayes playing in a band in Canberra in the early 1980s:

Elmo (Reed. A.k.a Peter Cook) was in them and Jonathon Jones and Rob Stevens, you know the sax player and it was like there was 400 people at The Ainsley Hotel, it was packed and this band’s there playing, No Concept, had a big Canberra band in 1980 and then out jumps this little guy whose long, curly frizzy hair, full on lots of hair right down to his bum with the Union Jack wrapped like a big nappy and red tights and sand shoes jumping around the stage and it was Tony Hayes, the singer out of No Concept. He was like this big super star (N. Dalton, personal communication, Sept 7, 2007).

Within the nomenclature of punk (Laing, 1985) the ideas conjured by the terms ‘No Concept’ and ‘Stevie Plunder’ are typical of the punk culture, although a little later in Canberra than the late 1970s high point in England. The Sandringham ‘scene’ could also be considered ‘punk’ through this frame, as John Encarnacao (personal communication, May 27, 2008) mentioned, with its do-it-yourself stage building and community driven renovations. Stevie played in the Gadflys with Dalton at the Sandringham in 1983 or 1984, and both left the band in 1984. They took Peter Velzen, the Gadflys’ drummer at the time, with them to form the first line-up of The Plunderers. The band moved to Melbourne for nine months before relocating to
Sydney, and first played at the Sandringham in 1985 according to Dalton’s recollections.

‘The Ballad of Lester Walker’ was played by The Plunderers although never released, its first release being the opening track on the first Whitlams’ CD. As a musician who had moved from Canberra, his hometown, to Melbourne and Sydney, the narrative of an ‘outsider’ looking for a home suggests a hint of autobiography here. My awareness of this feeling of placelessness or out-of-placeness may be due to my own migration from Ipswich to Sydney in 1985, also to pursue live music performance opportunities. The first verse shows us the character, but also lets us know of the character’s demise, aligning this song with many from the balladry or even murder balladry tradition (Van Der Merwe, 1989). Its chorus’ chord structure ties the song even more closely in this sense of ‘tradition’, being the chord progression used for the verse of Graham Gouldman’s ‘For Your Love’, made popular by The Yardbirds in 1965. (Coincidentally, Stevie Wonder won a Grammy in 1996 for a song of the same name).

Gouldman steps to the fifth of the scale for the chorus, while Plunder moves a major sixth between the verse and chorus. Perhaps this is best seen as a minor third movement eliciting a blues scale chord shift. Either way, the song, played in a shuffling 4/4, is firmly positioned in earlier song-writing traditions. Instrumentation is simple and reminiscent of past sounds with the double bass of Andy Lewis. This sound sits well with the ‘old Australian pub’ feel of the Sandringham Hotel with its original tiles and “ramshackle” (S. Bower and J. Lowe, personal communication, May 30, 2007) décor.

The first verse is delivered with double bass, drum kit tom-tom and picked guitar accompaniment, a sparse sonority that lets the listener concentrate on the lyrics. The arrangement builds with the addition of snare and cymbals within the first verse and piano at the beginning of the second verse. At the point of narrative crisis, “in the morning paper Lester reads that Sid is dead”, the band slows, articulating each chord in the progression in unison, and the following lines are accompanied by haunting backing vocals evoking the ghosts of the characters and dramatising the story before resuming the rock/shuffle feel. The sound of the recording sits far from the ‘grunge’
style that Stafford (2004) and many of the interviewees thought had washed over the independent music-making scene in Australia in the early nineties driven by the success of Nirvana’s ‘Never Mind’.

What you hear on the rest of the CD is a group of musicians enjoying their craft. There are extended sections of chat included as part of the last song. Freedman is heard teaching Louis Burdett the drum fill he would like in a song that does not appear on the CD. “A tasty role there”, he says followed by “not there, you fuck”, when Burdett puts the roll on the two beat instead of the four, all accompanied by Plunder’s unmistakable laugh. A song about “Andy’s (Lewis’) knob” is included made all the more amusing having known Lewis as one of the more reserved musicians of the scene (in speech if not behaviour). It seems that the band is directly recording the playing ethic it formulated on the Sandringham stage during their Saturday afternoon residency. As we listen we can imagine the audience around the bar, full of friends and filling up with beer as the lewd humour rollicks along with the shuffling beats. All tracks are minimally produced, with no keyboard washes, string arrangements or multi-layered guitars that become a feature of all the Whitlams’ albums after the death of Plunder and the replacement of Lewis. The sound is bare here, as bare as the tiles on the Sandringham walls or the old beer soaked linoleum on its floor. There is little artifice, with no stereo panning effects and the instruments sound as they would live.

Looking further into the lyric content of ‘The Ballad of Lester Walker’ we hear the story of someone “looking for a new place” and succeeding, but the place turns to space here as Plunder upsets the ABCB rhyming pattern with a play on words mid-line, and it is too close to my previous discussion of ‘Closing Time’ not to mention. Lester’s death by ‘releasing’ himself from a window became prescient for the community at the Sandringham when Plunder died as a result of a fall at Wentworth Falls in the Blue Mountains, west of Sydney. His death affected the community deeply. Every interviewee mentioned his passing, but Mark Hyland and Harry Ree expressed the deep personal change that his death meant to them. Ree bought the subject up in a general conversation about security at the place at a point in the interview when Hyland had stepped away. His reminiscence clearly shows his close identification with the place.
Ree: It’s dodgy, man but gees Brendan, we lived there you know, we lived there. Everything changed when Stevie died you know, that’s what I reckon. Everything changed. I don’t think it was conscious, it just did, everything, it’s just the way it felt. Obviously Gruesomes weren’t around any more.

Smyly: Yeah, Shouties changed. (to Hyland) Harry was just saying he felt it changed after Stevie died. Did you have the same feeling about that?

Hyland: Yeah, it’s going to sound melodramatic but I think everything changed then. I kind of look at things now as before and after Stevie.

R: Yeah, it’s not just the Sando, it’s everything.

H: But when I try and place things I always know January ’96, it was the biggest thing that happened in my life up to that point when that happened.

Plunder’s wake in Canberra included at least ten hours of communal singing, and when Mrs Hayes had had enough this was continued in the centre of Manuka oval, across the road from their house. His wake at the Sandringham was talked of by most interviewees, with particular mention of the number of people who could not find room in the hotel but filled the rear lane and the footpath of King St for that block.

To return to the song, there is a surface of drunken gallows humour about the song, but there are clues to a deeper significance. Like Lester, Plunder looked for a “new space” to call “home”, and playing every Tuesday with his brother Bernie and most Sundays with the Shout Brothers, he found it for a time at the Sandringham.

**Railhead – Crow**

In the red sea of heat and haze
Walk under the rail track, crawlin’ through the tunnel
Early morning crush my head in, Diesel ploughs right through the suburbs
And the cars don’t seem to worry

Refrain:
Railhead, railhead, railhead, railhead

When you work all night and sleep all day
Trouble getting mobile, lounging in the shade
Solar bomb hits me the hardest, round the corner duck my head in
And the beer just makes me sleepy
‘Railhead’ written by Peter Archer, was nominated for an Australian Record Industry Association (ARIA) award in 1993 in the Best Independent Single category. Released on Nic Dalton’s Half A Cow label, the song was the third track on the album *My Kind of Pain* (1993), and although this recording generated interest among the mainstream rock industry radio play was limited to the fringe broadcasters 2SER, and the then recently national 2JJJ. Along with Paris Green and Roaring Jack, Crow has been one of the bands most mentioned by interviewees for this research. Their live shows at the Sandringham were well attended and well received. Several of the members, if not all, were regular patrons of the site and as with all social milieu, the private/public boundaries of their personal worlds were sometimes on display. In an interview with Harry Ree and Mark Hyland, who played together in McBodybag, Ree remembered an incident at a Crow performance.

Ree: Actually, I’ve just remembered a huge fight at the Sando. It was …ummm…it was Crow playing one of their “Rock Against Work” gigs, it was a daytime gig, and there was something happening on stage and they…

Hyland: Woff versus Fenton…

R: They cut short the set or something. I’ve gone to the dunnies for a piss and Jim Woff and Peter Fenton were in there fucken’ having a go at each other. (laughing)

H: …and I was outside and…

Smyly: Musical differences…

R: That’s right!

H: One of them ran from the dunnies and across the stage and out on King St and ran down King St with the other one chasing him (all laugh) (M. Hyland and H. Ree, personal communication, Aug 28, 2008).

I talked with Chris McBurnie, Managing Director of Troy Horse studios, after this interview and he remembered the incident well. Lead singer Fenton rushed into Troy Horse, then situated almost directly across the street from the Sandringham, asking McBurnie to shield him from bass player Woff. I had experienced Woff’s temper first hand on a previous occasion. John Encarnacao recalled the incident, and in the following transcription, issues of my insider position in relation to this research come to the fore.
Encarnacao: I don't know why this leaps to mind and I don't know what it says about the Sando at all but I remember being there one night, I'm not even sure who was playing, but Louis Burdett was playing drums. Did he play with the Silver Tongues with Tim Freeman and Bernie Hayes?
Smyly: Not sure.
E: I'm not sure what the group was but Jim Woff from Crow was heckling, as he tended to do, and he just said something that bent Louis the wrong way and he just jumped off the stage to have a go at Jim. I don't remember it having any real harsh consequence but it was a very memorable event.
S: I can tell you that the bar person copped a drink in the face that night because I was the bar person.
E: Oh you remember that night.
B: Well yeah, I was there. I kicked Louis out and it was with the band Nude with Lisa Parrot and Cameron Undy. It was a great band.
E: Yeah, I remember seeing it.
S: Jim had just got some bad news from his girlfriend that she was having an affair.
E: Hah, with Louis.
S: Well no, she was having an affair with me so Jim had come down to get free beer off me and decided to let out his anger on Louis of all people and I eventually, after those two were at each others throats, you know, gripping each other by the throat, I was yelling at them to stop and so Louis picked up a drink and threw it in my face. I think it was a scotch actually.

There is a dilemma here for me. This was a personal epiphany and Jungian analysis could paint no more perfect script for transference of anger, driven by reactionary masculine ego surging through the actions of those characters in that place, and the prior causal behaviours acted elsewhere, by the three people. With regard to the design of this study, each was either performer, patron, or bar staff yet each were musicians who played regularly at the place. Burdett played with Paris Green, with Louis Tillett or Tina Harrod singing on a regular Monday night residency in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and is also the subject of the song by The Whitlams ‘You Sound like Louis Burdett’. Woff had called out “very clever”, after Nude (Cameron Undy; electric bass/ Lisa Parrott: alto saxophone) had ended one particularly complex jazz arrangement, which could be describes as in the precision Sydney-jazz style reminiscent of recordings by Bernie McGann and John Pochée, and he had waited for the clapping to cease so he could be heard (and seen) clearly.
Burdett, known for his talent but also a personal irascibility, leapt over his kit and was beside Woff very quickly. I was the male staff member and felt it my role at the time to intervene. Identities of other participants in this socio-political interaction are as much at risk of experiencing sadness or embarrassment (or other adverse effects) at the retelling of the event and its causes, as are the three people involved on the night. However, the story displays much about how closely the participants in the culture of the place were involved in each other’s lives. My memory of the story came back during the interview with Encarnacao, and the speed at which I delivered the account reveals my enthusiasm for the study. Also, my strong feelings at the time were remembered (and still are) and this, together with the acknowledgement of the unknown effects this retelling may have on others, poses an ethical dilemma. Encarnacao and I are close friends, sharing work and social interactions, as well as collaborating musically. It seemed a natural tale to retell with him, but in this narrative it requires more justification. Here it sits as a mark of the group’s internal volatility, and part of the sound we hear from Crow.

The recognition given ‘Railhead’ by the mainstream industry led to the band signing a record deal with rooArt, a relatively new label that had secured an important distribution and funding deal with PolyGram Australia (Mathieson, 2000). Although Mathieson documents this major record company’s dip in the murky waters of the Australian independent music scene, he concentrates on artists who ‘crossed over’, in other words, artists whose sound was deemed palatable enough for FM radio airplay. Crow’s, “beautiful, yet unhinged” (Blunt, 2001) style of impassioned noise rock was not accepted for national mainstream airplay despite their steady stream of supports for touring rock acts like Headless Chickens, Mudhoney, Nirvana and Sonic Youth. Within the first few seconds of ‘Railhead’ we hear and see why. Although the song revolves around a simple A/Bm/E chord progression, the sonic and rhythmic properties of the recording mark the band as something heavy and dark, something much more complex than the clean punchy guitar of what I will term, acceptable rock music. The passions displayed by the band members and recalled in the earlier interview with Hyland seem to translate easily to the sonic properties of ‘Railhead’.

A rumbling, rhythmic bass anacrusis of one and a half beats leads in to the almost droning A major chord, topped by a repeated high F# to C# ostinato delivered in
souring guitar feedback. The song repeats this opening section often, as if returning to the haze and heat the lyric conjures. The steady 4/4 beat is made more complex by the bass’ double time articulation, with syncopated accents mostly, but not always, on the first, second and a half and fourth beats. The high sometimes vibrato ostinato is also syncopated, F# for four beats, C# for four, picked on the first, and second and a half beats, but this attack is syncopated slightly differently at times, and a long delay or echo makes the timing less defined. Like the train in the lyric, the band “ploughs right through the suburbs” in an assault of messy guitar noise. The listener is driven silent by the sound, much like the staff at the Sandringham who, by being positioned directly in front of the guitar amps on stage, had a hard time hearing anything other than the beautiful mess of this impassioned howl. Crow performances are among my most memorable, due in no small part to their immediate display of rock performance process, and the emotion connection they elicited from an audience as a result. “Round the corner, duck my head in” shows where the narrator is going to find some respite from the glare and noise, and it maps the short journey to the hotel from tightly packed local streets. The night has been long and the sun and light of the new day are too painful. As Nadia Rangan said in an interview,

Rangan: It was daytime but it was night-time in here, as it always was. So, yeah, I have a really clear memory of that.
Smyly: So you think it was night-time all the time at the Sando.
R: Yes, it had that vibe to it, sunny day outside, get into the Sando and that sun’s all gone which was part of the joy or the comfort rather (N. Rangan, personal communication, May 23, 2008).

The Sandringham offered a permanent night for those whose lives revolved around the rock music performance and its socially exuberant aftermaths. “And the beer just makes me sleepy” reminds us of the alcohol-based Sandringham subculture Encarnacao and McBurnie describe elsewhere. It is as if the narrator, in seeking some comfort from his hangover steps around the corner to the pub and orders a beer. The soaring ostinato in ‘Railhead’ sounds like the nagging headache of over-consumption, and the rhythmic syncopation replicates the train rumbling along the two rail-lines that trisect Newtown. As anybody who lived in the vicinity of the Sandringham could testify, the late-night goods trains literally shook the suburbs adjoining. In the end, even the solace of alcohol offers no satisfaction, just
sleepiness. The venue was also on King Street which at that time was on the direct truck route between the docks of Whites Bay or the Glebe container terminal, and the Tempe container yard adjacent the Kingsford Smith airport. King Street, Newtown is part of National Highway One, and the Sydney end of the Princes Highway, the coast road to Melbourne and eventually to Port Augusta over 1900 kilometres away in South Australia. Traffic noise was ubiquitous, so although the night envelopes the narrator as he steps in, the noise, like the repeated F#/C# high ostinato in the song, does not change. All repeats into another long night.

*My Kind of Pain* (Crow, 1993), the album from which ‘Railhead’ comes, was recorded in Chicago at the studio of Steve Albini, a well-known hard rock musician and sound engineer. As Marc Faris (2004) points out, Albini displays a no-nonsense approach to recording, aiming to record a band with as little production input as possible. As ‘Railhead’s’ singer/songwriter/guitarist Peter Archer told Bob Blunt “I don’t think he really cared who we were or where we came from” (Blunt, 2001: 137). Far from the comfort of the Sandringham hotel, in the cold mid-west USA, Jim Woff felt the “dysfunctional, sloppy” (2001: 137) band could have used some direction and mentoring from the famous engineer. The hand written notes on the CD’s inner-sleeve describe the experience of the “four sleepy and confused losers” in the United States, and the description is frank and honest. It displays an authenticity much as the Sandringham does. The inner-sleeve has a handmade look with snippets of hand-written lyrics in various hands, scribbled around torn photos of the band, some pets, US motel signs. All looks to have little pretension, but like the circular bar, concerned only with itself, turned in on itself, in a permanent night-time of rumbling trains and beer. The song roles to a stop in an extended rallentando, a train slowing into a siding.

**Ring of Fire – Magic Lunchbox**

Refrain: Ring of Fire, flaming out my arse hole
Ring of Fire, flaming out my arse

Sitting in a restaurant. It’s Indian.
I wipe the curry paste from my sweltering face
It’s so hot.
Across the table whaddoo I see?
There are some people that are digging in deep
to something…….Oh God! I still think it’s alive!
“Where are you going?”
“My arse is on fire”.

Spray the can with my arsehole.
The feeling of being empty is so good
That I almost forget the pain that I’m in
Deep within my ring.
Close the door, just gotta laugh.
I step aside and let the drunk stumble past
Pretty soon he’ll be yelling – Get me out of here!
“Where ya goin’?”
“My arse is ON FIRE!” – Refrain.

Reading the lyric to this song I am transported back to high school, or even earlier to that beautiful age where any inappropriate or obscene reference becomes unbelievably funny. It seems an immediate transgression to include such a song in this study. When listening to the song, or remembering live performances at the Sandringham, the perspective changes somewhat. Could there be something other than ‘schoolboy’ humour here? If we agree that,

*Popular music presents an often hidden perception of our world and social values. Music, through encoded meaning and the exploration of experiences, can trace relationships between culture and place, while also contributing to the construction of social and spatial identities* (Carroll & Connell, 2000: 141),

...can we trace any codes here, with meanings uncovering this group’s experience of the Sandringham? Are the puns as humorous as the lyric? Could this be a psychological strategy employed in order to make sense of the seemingly senseless?

The song comes from the 1995 CD *The Yeeros Living Dangerously* (Lunchbox, 1995) released by Troy Horse. Other album titles from the band include *Dickheads*
and Rainbows and Spastique, an album I played saxophone on. ‘Yeeros’ was recorded at Troy Horse Studios, just across the road from the Sandringham, and was produced by John Encarnacao. Encarnacao’s name, however, appears on the CD notes as “Encarnawhatever” and “En-carcinogenic Substance”. He is not alone in having his name ‘hidden’ or ‘encoded’. Among the band members, the guitarist/vocalist is listed as Ernie Luney, and the other guitarist as Danny Night-Time. These two, along with Robert Child, are the remaining original members and all attended the same schools in the culturally diverse south-western suburbs of Sydney. Luney and Night-Time both worked either behind the bar or in the Sandringham’s bottle shop. They both appeared in the band Bottle Shop Boys at the Sandringham’s Sweet Sixteen birthday celebration (see Figure 10). Their association with the hotel was, like many of the musicians who also worked at the site, close and renewed almost daily. This access facilitated organising gigs at the venue a much easier task compared with bands whose members did not maintain a close association there.

Figure 10 – Flyer printed for the Sweet 16 birthday celebrations held in 1996; 16 years of live music-making. Magic Lunchbox play Sat 5th Oct with Front End Loader and Whopping Big Naughty, Justin Hayes’ band.
Listening to this song is like listening to a song Frank Zappa may have written for Guns and Roses. The vocal line, and therefore the lyric, is not the focus of the piece. What is preferred here is musical dexterity and proficiency of the players. Riff on riff sections, vocal lines in unison with guitar lines, abrupt stops followed by fast-tempo drum fills, all help to set up an almost comic display of musical prowess. Comedy voiceovers repeat certain words, and the words are delivered in a spoken rather than sung voice. The first 30 seconds of the piece set an ethnically recognisable soundscape. We hear a sitar drone in C accompanied by drums, but the drums are African, not the tabla we could expect. The sitar begins a melodic improvisation, to be interrupted by a strained voice complaining of “fire”. This is cheap humour but professes nothing else. Heavy rock riffs in A major swamp the sitar, but the major key centre of the piece becomes C major.

Danny Murphy, editor of street press magazine Revolver, regarded the early line up of The Whitlams as typical of the “drunken, talented, piss-taking approach to life” (Carroll & Connell, 2000: 145) that was on display at the Sandringham hotel. Magic Lunchbox could easily be described similarly. Songs from this album include ‘Benny Hill United 4 Everyone Else 0’ and ‘Nudity Bucket’. The back cover of the CD shows a photograph of a mid-1970s Valiant Regal cruising up King Street (it seems) with surf boards on roof racks and a towel clad surfer lounging on the boot. Inside the cover we see the ‘boys’ with surfboards, in wetsuits, in board-shorts holding a beer and smoking; it could only be described as Australian male coastal culture. Without listening we can see the band as male and white and as an Australian pub rock band, this is no surprise.

*OZ Rock has entailed a particularly narrow sense of belonging, being for the most part about white, male and suburban experiences* (Homan, 2003b: 166).

Are the white boys of Magic Lunchbox displaying their suburban upbringing, and doing so in oppositional terms, ridiculing Indian food, and Lebanese political troubles? The reference to Benny Hill is interesting. As Judith Halberstam (2001) argues in defence of accusations of racism and sexism levelled against Hill, it may be that this is more self parody than dumb white boy racism.
Poynting and Mason (2007) document well the anti-Muslim rants that litter the mainstream media in Australia, but we are in the Sando here, and the reference to ‘Lebanese Tim’ is couched in terms of his toughness (‘don’t fuck with him’). Apart from the insinuation that Indians serve live creatures as food, the narrative of this song is about the narrator’s inability to deal with the consequences of eating spicy meals. I am conscious of judging in favour of my Sandringham acquaintances here. Some of the subject matter sat uncomfortably with me as I watched the band perform at the venue. As stated elsewhere in this thesis, my negotiation with the site was being discussed and analysed week by week as part of a long psychotherapeutic process. It could be that it was my inherent prejudices that made me bristle at subjects like falling in love with gay women, or at the juvenile descriptions and race based generalisations that were their principal song subjects.

Magic Lunchbox play with controversial subject matter in the same manner as they play with chord progressions. Their musical dexterity is as precise as their lyric content is laughable. After throw away lines like ‘I fell in love with a gay girl, she may be coming by, this afternoon’, which revolve around the meaning of the word ‘by’ and confusion on the words ‘be coming’ (or is it becoming?), the band leap into overblown Van Halen-esque guitar solos in thirds, with feet propped on the bar and faux pained facial expressions for good measure. Their outfits were often open-necked shirts with faux-gold jewellery and tight satin pants in bold greens and reds, all very obvious comedy attire making themselves the focus of ridicule, much as British band The Darkness have done ten years later.

Both men and women interviewees mentioned the band. Lena Minutillo, barperson and regular patron remembered the band’s gigs well.

Minutillo: I mean, Magic Lunchbox were fantastic as well. I absolutely love them and I just thought they were fantastic, yeah (L. Minutillo, personal communication, Aug 9, 2007).

Minutillo had recall too of some of the songs and subject matter.
M:…and Magic Lunchbox, you know, one minute they’re serving takeaways in the bottlo and the next minute they’re up “he’s Lebanese Tim, don’t fuck with him” you know. How funny (ibid).

Murray Rees, barperson and bottleshop manager also recalled words and songs.

Rees: Magic Lunchbox blew my head away the first time I saw them, they were funny, with Howie, they were fuckin’ phenomenal.
Smyly: Oh that’s right, he was the singer at that stage.
R: Yeah, doing great songs like Ring of Fire, Burning up my Arsehole (M. Rees, personal communication, July 12, 2007).

This was at a time when most of the Australian independent music-making scene was in the thrall of Nirvana. As Andrew Stafford states,

...as divisive as it was defiant, at the very least it set the agenda and the benchmark for much of the decade to come (Stafford, 2004: 188).

This influence aptly described was evident at the Sandringham and Kirsty Lenthal, who was booking bands and therefore listening to demo tapes of bands wanting to perform at the place for much of the 1990s saw parallels between the Seattle band’s style, and the look and feel of the pub.

It was at the same time, you know ‘Nirvana’ had just started to…. ‘Nirvana’ came through in what ’92, ’93, so grunge really became quite prevalent and you saw that progression from the grunge which, the Sando was already grungy, do you know what I mean (K. Lenthal, personal communication, July 17 and 23, 2007).

This puts greater light on the Magic Lunchbox approach, and their oppositional stance becomes a form of defying the perceived indie-rock hegemony. The world of rock was listening to ‘Smells Like Teen Spirit’ and discussing the intensity of emotional outpourings from a generation many had thought could not understand the meaning of rock rebellion. These were youth seen now with feelings and anger, and the thrashy guitars to make people listen. Sydney saw many bands moving towards this Seattle angst delivery, not that it lacked formidable exponents already as documented elsewhere (Blunt, 2001).
Yet Magic Lunchbox continued to trip on the big dumb rock riff, followed in short order by the triple-time paradiddle and length-of-the-neck modal lead run in thirds. The subjects discussed were juvenile. Blistering synchronisation was followed by the smutty aside delivered in ham Asian accent which left the audience astonished and affronted, but most often laughing. Anything seemed possible. Like the social identities formed at the Sandringham at that time, identities assumed and changeable, ‘Ring of Fire’ maps a cultural milieu in equal parts defiantly offensive, yet dextrously talented and enthusiastically performative.

**R’n’R Band and SOB – McBobybag**

I started my journey with a whimper and a bang  
As a puppy dog tries to follow me away  
And I bump into a lovely flock of queens  
Coming out at the Newtown but I turn the other way  
Past the new Beaten Tracks guitar on display  
And the lonely busker plays till he breaks a string

Refrain:  
Stand Aside, (stand aside)  
Stand aside, I’m going to cross the street  
As soon as King and Enmore meet  
Chorus:  
I’ve got an appointment to keep with  
A rock and roll band and a schooner of beer  
Nothings going to stop me seeing that  
Rock and roll band an a schooner of beer  
And if you want to keep me company with a  
Rock and roll band and a schooner of beer  
I’ll be glad I went to the pub tonight

The Art Market’s closed as is the library upstairs  
And the North Indian Diner’s like a breath of fresh air  
As the left and the further left tries to do what’s right  
There’s Thai food here and Thai food there  
And the Bank Hotel never seems to have a care  
In the world, Oh Sleepers I’ll see you later on tonight
Refrain.
Chorus.

McBodybag’s identification with the Sandringham is the defining principal for the band’s existence. Of all the bands and songs that could have been chosen for this study, no other expresses close identification with the place more than this song from this band. McBodybag was conceived by people who had met at the site and they played the vast majority of their gigs there. Song titles on their only recording include ‘Evan Dando at the Sando’ and ‘Bernie Hayes’, positioning the band as heavily influenced by the place. This song celebrates the pleasure of walking down King Street to the venue and describes the expectation of enjoying some sociable leisure time there. Along the way the narrator passes landmarks, signposts of the Newtown cultural mix, and plans interactions with them in the coming hours. Harry Ree wrote the song and sings it on the McBodybag CD ‘We Know the Bass Player’ (McBodybag, 1994) originally released as a cassette. Initially approached as a patron for this study he is acknowledged here as a musician.

Walking through the lyrics we see the narrator leaving the home, and the puppy that wants to tag along. It is a solo journey however, and as several interviewees have mentioned, the Sandringham was a “scary” place, not for puppies. Harry Ree, having grown up in Maroubra, remembers how South Newtown, the area around the Sandringham, was seen as a dangerous place for he and his young friends to ride their bicycles through on the way home from sporting fixtures. The narrator passes a “flock of queens”, a reference to the thriving gay culture that had found a home on King Street after Paddington had become gentrified. The Newtown Hotel in particular held nightly drag shows. There is a joke here: “Coming out at Newtown”, further reference to the gay culture, but the singer “turns the other way”, affirming his sexuality. There could also be a notion here of “coming out” from the side street onto King St. This positions King Street as a socially and sexually open place, a place to come out to from the surrounding suburban streets, a place where sexual orientation could be displayed and socially acknowledged. The next lines map our path past various shops. Beaten Tracks was a popular second-hand record and musical equipment store now closed, but buskers are still a common presence on
King Street. “The left” refers to the socialist bookshop/library and acknowledges the political mix of the area, identifying the alternative to ‘left’ as “very far left”.

Crossing the street “where King and Enmore meet” shows us which part of Newtown the singer is in giving us a clear geographic marker. “Shared social practices”, writes Holly Kruse (2003: 121), “serve to lessen the symbolic space between performer and audience.” In this song, Ree describes the walk to the hotel and listeners can map the area and the society, map their own walk, remembering particular buskers or that take-away meal shared in the diner. The walk to the Sandringham is a social practice shared by performer and audience member as the song is shared from the stage.

Not only the walk. The fact that the listener is sitting at the bar of the Sando enjoying the same leisure, the same rock and roll and beer experience the song speaks of, ties all in the room to the band and the band to all in the room. The band is performing the experience of being there listening to themselves.

_The aesthetic values which dominate local alternative terrains are for the most part those of a musical cosmopolitanism wherein the points of musical reference are likely to remain stable from one community to another_ (Straw, 1991b: 379).

There is definitely a musical cosmopolitanism being displayed in this song and in the venue in general. However, the musical aesthetic of the McBodybag song is nothing ‘new’, or particularly ‘alternative’. The chorus’ chord structure is almost a replication of Buffalo Tom’s ‘Taillights Fade’, a song the Shout Brothers played regularly at gigs Hyland and Ree attended regularly. As Ree and Hyland discussed with me the reasons for liking the Sandringham and for becoming regular visitors were beyond the musical aesthetics of the scene.

Ree: It’s like my old flatmate Clair Mortimer. When I moved out of Rawson St behind the Sando and moved to the share place up in North Newtown and Clair my flatmate would always go to me “How can you go to the Sando every night?” You know, “every night!” To be honest I didn’t have an answer, you know so what do you do? So I took her down. I must have been a Shouties or a Gruesome evening and um…took her down once and she was hooked. You know, It was like…it was the bands, it was the music….
Hyland: No, No, I disagree with that. I was bagged by Pete from Disneyfist..”Why do you go and see the Shouties all the time? They play all the same songs every week.” It was about seeing the people that are going there. Sit around and talking shit. The Gruesomes would play…you know..95% of the songs you’ve heard them play before and you’ll hear them play the same thing again, with the Shouties and with the Gruesomes, Roaring Jack…it was always…Shaggin’ Wagon the same thing. hear the same songs, but it was more about the people you're going to sit round with and talking shit and…(M. Hyland and H. Ree, personal communication, Aug 28, 2008).

As discussed in the ‘Community’ chapter, the truth of what remained attractive about the place is contested even between these two close friends, who sat together at the bar and formed this band to celebrate their enthusiasm for the place. Having heard ‘Taillights Fade’ so many times, it is not unreasonable to think that the sound of the chord progression has made its way into this McBodybag tune. The Am/D/G/F#/Em progression is common in rock/pop songs. The markers that identify this song are therefore not overtly musical. The call and response during the pre-chorus or refrain section (“stand aside”) has the effect of encouraging audience participation though, and like Bow Campbell’s ‘Closing Time’, that section is easily remembered and sung in thirds, offering an easy harmonic participation. The band does not see itself as talented musically. In the interview Ree mentioned the comments from one of the security staff.

Ree: I remember a guy called Gary the bouncer, remember Gary the bouncer? I reckon we found out later that he was a copper, at Newtown station. He was actually moonlighting after hours doing security work which I reckon was…don’t think we had to deal with him or whatever…don’t think I knew that when I knew him at the Sando, I just thought he was…cause he was there every night. But I do remember when he saw us, he saw McBodybag on stage there I remember him saying “You guys aren’t a band, you’re a bunch of drunks”. And I remember we used that quote on one of our flyers of something….you know, turned out he was a copper moonlighting as a security guard (M. Hyland and H. Ree, personal communication, Aug 28, 2008).

Both Ree and Hyland found this very amusing. By denying their musicality, and by promoting this assessment as a quotation on a band flyer, they display a willingness to align themselves as patrons of the hotel rather than entertainers, or they bring the stage down to the level of the bar in some sense. This is replicated in the song, where
the experience of seeing a band becomes the subject matter for the band. When talking about the recording process, which took place in Troy Horse Studios situated over the other side of King Street, both became apologetic for what they felt were poor performances during the session, but Hyland felt also that the immediacy of the mistakes could not be replicated and the recording was better for having performative anomalies included.

Ree: Yeah, there was a live sort of tightness to it. Yeah there was a bit of mixing that could be, if we felt so inclined you know.
Hyland: You could never actually record if you wanted to. Rock ‘n’ roll band and Schooner of Beer into the Sando from the north end of Newtown and when the second verse starts, Harry’s guitar drops out and then just as it comes back into the build up you hear this crack, crack that comes back in again and what had happened was his lead fell out and he was doing the guide vocal and trying to plug his lead in and finally got it perfectly right time to plug it back in and it was completely fluked and he was kind of looking around going we’ve just got the tape and I’ve gone no, we’ll just play it out and see how it sounded and just sounds fucking great which you couldn’t record that (ibid).

This again speaks to the “ramshackle” ethos of the culture but also to how the musicians appreciate the live performance ethic, influenced in my mind by the hundreds of live performances they witnessed at the venue. The circumstances that led to the recording of the CD are also indicative of the extent to which the band was tied to the prevailing ethos of the Sandringham.

Ree: It was the local neighbourhood watch centre, or child care centre auction at the Sando. Troy Horse were putting up twelve hours of recording time as a…one of the umm.
Smyly: Auction items.
R: Yep, yep. And we sort of ended up getting it.
Hyland: We put up $50 each..
R: Ikka, Ikka chucked in about…he chucked in a sixth share or something or fifth share…there were four of us so…
H: Then we ended up bidding against Marna who was Disneyfist’s manager, she wanted to get that for Disneyfist and so they were…
S: and you were in both bands…
H: Yeah, both bands.
R: That’s my only experience ever in a real recording studio (ibid).
Hyland explained how he had to talk with the manager of his ‘serious’ band Disneyfist, to convince her to stop bidding so he and the other members of McBodybag could win the auction. Community events were common at the Sandringham and are discussed in another chapter of this thesis. With twelve hours of recording time they put down eighteen tracks, which in terms of usual popular music recording practices has to be described as extremely fast. So the opportunity to record comes directly from the place as well, and Ree relished the idea of a “real” studio experience. Recording possibility also grew from a collective economic bid as each of the band members and some supporters of the band put in money. Listening to the CD, burnt from the originally released cassette, it is easy to hear the haste in the recording process. As mentioned above, mistakes are included. Changes in tempo throughout individual songs are evident although could be partly attributed to the quality of the cassette from which the burn is taken, but the musical qualities of the sonic assemblage are not the focus. The band is focussed on the subject matter, and the subject and object speak of the Sandringham. At first thought the band’s name is quite obviously a political commentary on the poor health benefits from eating multinational fast food chain fare, but my insider position has caused this assumption. Hyland explained how his work experiences influenced his engagement with the hotel and how he received a political education through the hotel.

Hyland: I was in IT then. No, actually I wasn’t even doing that then. I was working in the city just dealing shit for a merchant bank. Running around, delivering cheques, doing some account reconciliations and just crap like that. It was actually Elder’s Finance which was fun going and seeing Roaring Jack about the downfall, the capitalist system and I was working for John Elliott which was kept secret for a long time.

Smyly: Really, you didn’t tell anyone because of that?

H: I didn’t not tell them but didn’t consciously bring it up.

S: Yeah, Roaring Jack fans. Do you think there were other people in there that were the same?

H: Oh fuck, yeah. There was just that model of middle socialists. I dabbled with them for a while and learned most of my political stuff and called myself a socialist for a while and got over that (M. Hyland and H. Ree, personal communication, Aug 28, 2008).

Roaring Jack were explicit in their support for left-wing political ideology and action, and Hyland having a day job working for one of the most recognised champions of conservative politics and capitalist ideology in Australia at the time,
could have been singled out as ‘one of them’. This is suggested in light of his story about Stevie Plunder ridiculing his suit when he stopped by to collect take-away beer on the way home from work. Much as the Sandringham was seen as “welcoming”, left-leaning or a better term may be ‘liberal’ views were espoused and defended there. Plunder’s band with Tim Freedman and Andy Lewis, instigated at the place, was called The Whitlams in homage to Gough Whitlam, the twice elected socially progressive Australian Prime Minister (Carroll & Connell, 2000). Even though Hyland got “over” his identification as a socialist the band he began with his friends from the Sandringham was given an anti-capitalist name. So it could be that ‘McBodybag’ carries with it a deeper criticism of the prevailing relationships between corporate capital and the funding of military interventions in political processes worldwide. I take it as more localised humour however, supported in part by the name of the album. *We Know the Bassplayer* came with a list of the bass players the band were friends with along with the band/s they played in. It is a document closely aligning the band to the local band scene, and firmly positioning the band at the Sandringham. One important aspect of the realisation of this recording yet to be discussed is the influence of Trot Horse Studios located opposite the Sandringham. I will now take a brief look at this business and the interactions between it and the hotel through an interview with the Managing Director of the business, Chris McBurnie.

**Troy Horse**

Troy Horse began as a band co-operative where musicians could pool resources and purchase posters, rehearsal time and book gigs as a collective, thus minimising the financial burden on non-profitable performance returns while maximising the value their funds could attract. As McBurnie explains the connection between Troy Horse and the Sandringham predated the business premises opposite the hotel.

Troy Horse was a co-op and I remember of about six bands, in my first introduction actually to Troy Horse was seeing posters around with Troy Horse Co-op and with gigs at the likes of the Sando and stuff like that. Evidently Troy Horse Co-op got its launch at the Sando (C. McBurnie, personal communication, Oct 2, 2008).
Posters usually advertise one gig and one band (with support bands sometimes), so by using posters to promote a collection of gigs and bands scant funds could be used more efficiently. This also had the effect of positioning the Troy Horse name as associated with many venues and many bands. McBurnie remembers meeting members of the co-op while he worked at the Journalist’s club in Elizabeth Street, Surry Hills in the late 1980s.

McBurnie: The concept of Troy Horse started as a co-op of bands who wanted to get together rehearsal space and book venues, book gigs as a co-op so they came as a package deal, kind of thing. It took care of all the publicity and advertising.

Smyly: Great, good idea. When did you join?

McB: 1990 I joined. Troy Horse booked the journos and I was the bouncer there and I was sort of bouncing at night time and during the day time I was a pre-school teacher so it was dealing with the same mentalities. The two people who were running Troy Horse at the time wanted to go overseas and they needed someone to look after it for six months and I got the job but I kind of think I only got the job because I was the only one without a drug habit at the time.

His view of the mentality of rock band personalities is delivered partly in jest, but as someone who has now been running a rock music centred business for over twenty years I am inclined to take his view as partly serious. The prevalence of illegal drug taking in the inner Sydney music-making scene is again evidenced. After running a small recording space in Sydney’s lower north-shore suburb Naremburn, Troy Horse looked for a more spacious and permanent premises to include rehearsal space, finding it on King Street across the road and a few doors down from the Sandringham. This move happened in 1988 or 1989, prior to McBurnie’s involvement.

C: No, no, this is before me. I can pretty well say that the Newtown thing, they wanted something in Newtown I know that. I think having it close to the Sando was lucky. It just happened this building was there and the rent was reasonable with enough space to do what they wanted to do. The fact it was so close to the Sando I don’t think it was planned, it could have been a little bit further away but they just got lucky. When we moved it was lucky as well. We moved basically two spots closer.

B: Yep, straight across the road almost.

C: But by that stage we knew the value of being close to it (ibid).
This move was lucky for both the Sandringham and the business as now bands could store band gear and rehearse within easy reach of a venue they had a good chance of getting a gig in, and a venue where other musicians either worked or socialised on a daily basis. As can be seen in the story of the charity auction above, the Sandringham received support from the business in financial assistance for prizes and ultimately in the patronage from people who were interested and invested in the practice of music-making. The value of this relationship became clearer as time moved on and McBurnie saw this in terms other than economic, an idea expressed by people how worked at the Sandringham as well.

McBurnie: Basically, us coming from a co-op and that co-op mentality and stuff like that, the sense of community and musicians as a group the Sand sort of had … I don’t know if the right word is ethos or whatever … to do with us so our mentalities were pretty much the same. They were right into the bands and the music and supporting the local talent and the bands that they booked were the level of bands we had at rehearsal. We weren’t getting the Jimmy Barnes’ and we still don’t, we don’t really want to but sort of that indie … the independent rock thing was what our market was and we were lucky enough to have a venue across the road which booked the same things but the pub itself had the same mentality and the people who booked it. And it was also, we took the piss out of virtually everything and they did and I don’t know we just clicked (ibid).

A shared ethos of support for local acts over a drive to attract more mainstream and economically successful musicians, typified in his view by Jimmy Barnes, the one time lead singer of Cold Chisel, made the social connections between the institutions valuable. Like many people interviewed, and discussed at length in the ‘community’ section, the preference for a “sense of community” outweighed usual business concerns for maximising profit and business expansion. Troy Horse Studios continue their business in this way at the time of writing, from premises in Redfern and their services can be viewed on their website. Services they offer were offered regularly to the Sandringham over many years as McBurnie details.

McBurnie: Yeah, we did a lot of work for them and plus even little things. Because we were just across the road with a photocopier and the number of times they had to come over because their equipment, the mics had fucked up and you know, they were constantly borrowing mics and leads and it was always ‘yeah, yeah, whatever’. I mean we had a really good relationship with them.
Smyly: Yeah, back and forwards.
McB: Yeah but no, it certainly had a sense of community about it and something you wanted
to be part of I dare say. For someone from the outside it might have been a bit intimidating, I
don’t know (ibid).

This “sense of community” is a prevailing narrative in this analysis. Here the notion
translates as free photocopying, free rental of microphones and microphone leads and
servicing of the Sandringham’s in-house P.A. equipment. He remembers printing t-
shirts and posters for the venue at vastly reduced rates. For McBurnie, this was an
attractive ethos to ‘belong’ to, and this sits in opposition to his previously described
feelings of being “out of place” on his first visit to the venue on a Tuesday,
Gruesome Twosome, night. The frequency of his visits and the close interaction with
bands at Troy Horse in his work role and in the venue in a social role, quickly moved
his identification as an outsider to an insider. He expresses his empathy for those
who visit the venue as outsiders remembering his own process of introduction.

C: Because they had this reputation of ‘the place’ and it took me a while to get to know
people because I virtually came in not knowing anyone associated with it (ibid).

Questioned further about the scene operating there he said,

McBurnie: You know, you were embraced by your frequency I suppose, the more you turn
up the more likely people are going to…
Smyly: Was it easy to get to know people there?
McB: Definitely. The good thing about it was it was very open and friendly. I love a pub
where you walk in and before you ask for your beer they know what you want and it’s on the
counter for you (ibid).

His association soon changed and the symbiotic relationship built between Troy
Horse and the Sandringham facilitated the high output of live and recorded material
from the culture. He views the Sandringham as a collective with his use of “they”
above, rather than ascribing the operation of the hotel to either the licensee or owner.
As a director of a business that began as a co-operative, he identifies the
Sandringham as operating in the same way, with staff, patrons and performers
occupying undemarcated roles it would seem. From my experience, many
performances at the Sandringham continued despite gear failure due directly to the
proximity and generosity of Troy Horse Studios. This relationship was strengthened and facilitated by the physical movements of people between the two premises, and this was made memorable for him by the ways in which people would act out this short journey.

C: So it was a constant traffic across King Street. I’m surprised no-one ... Stevie Plunder’s was a funny one, when they’d play there we could actually hear him coming. This is when we were at the first Troy Horse because it had a slight incline down King Street, across the road and that, and he’d actually ride his amp across the road to the door and we’d actually hear it coming and open the door up before he got there and shit. So, it was a constant stream of people but sorry, I got away from the question then (ibid).

I have got away from the question of songs of the Sando too, but the closeness of the relationship between the two places is expressed well in this story. To return to songs, their support of live performance at the Sandringham extended to financial support of recorded artefacts through their role at one time as a record label. The next exchange outlines not only the many bands who benefited from the organisation’s support for local acts but how the operation of a record label comes with hierarchies that could impinge on the kind of support musical output at a local level needs, in McBurnie’s view.

Smyly: Yeah, so Magic Lunchbox album and…
McBurnie: Yeah. The ones we put out?
S: Yeah.
McB: Yeah, Lunchbox, Disneyfist, Vicious Hairy Mary, you know, blah, blah, blah, blah (workmate interrupts). There’s heaps of the bands because it was a label at one stage, Troy Horse and a lot of them…
S: You don’t do the label any more?
McB: No. It sort of…
S: Non profitable?
McB: It was non-profitable definitely. I mean the last one we did do, it’s funny, the last one we did was actually the best one. We did the first Eskimo Joe.
S: And they did quite well. They’re doing quite well now too aren’t they?
McB: Yeah, obviously they did really well but I don’t like the label thing. Because we run rehearsals and stuff like that it creates a pecking order. I wasn’t into it even back then to be honest. It creates a pecking order of people who rehearse there, you’re good enough to be on the label, you’re not.
S: Right.
McB: It’s like getting a rehearsal room to book a venue. It’s kind of like…
S: If you rehearse with us you’ll get this.
McB: Yeah, which I don’t like. I think that everyone who walks through the door is treated equal. I don’t care if you’ve had 10 fucking albums or…
S: Or it’s your first go.
McB: …or your first entry and you’re just buying a lolly pop you still get treated the same which may mean we put shit on you but … which is our thing to take the piss out of everyone … but the label did produce. It’s surprising the label had about 50 releases of various things. It surprised me when I saw the list last year.

Although the business operates on a co-operative model, hierarchies of importance become attached to bands that are perceived to hold a close insider role in relation to the business. McBurnie’s view of the co-operative model found support in the way he experienced the Sandringham to operate, and he clearly states his personal ethic of equal treatment of all customers when describing why the record label, although artistically successful became problematic. Eskimo Joe have moved on to being an ARIA winning and Gold Record receiving act with a strong national and burgeoning international profile. Most independent record labels would pursue this kind of success, following a business model seen in multi-national record labels. Although McBurnie first experienced the Sandringham as a hierarchical scene where everybody “seemed to know everybody” (ibid), his business ethic actively avoids these barriers to simple human interactions in the production and facilitation of recorded artefacts like Magic Lunchbox’s *The Yeeros Living Dangerously* (Lunchbox, 1995). Troy Horse Studios hold many recordings, t-shirts and posters, a collection ripe for survey and documentation. There are further avenues for deeper analysis here, and in other songs and bands identified as Sandringham bands, and I hope to continue this work in future.

**Conclusion**

Talking with songwriters who identified with the venue, influences from the place could be seen in their work but remained hidden to themselves. Socio-political ideologies and socio-economic possibilities have been played out in the way various influences took shape in the minds of those creating sonic artefacts in and around the site. One musician mentions the place as an influence in the way he perceived social
interactions between men and women being mediated through alcohol consumption, whereas another had an internal picture of the internal architecture and drew on this when needed in a song narrative. One denied the influence of the site yet his current musical practice remain predicated on the years his musicianship was moulded by the physical and social circumstances that were intimately connected to the place. ‘Influence’ on artistic output having regard to a particular place remains dependent on the individual perceptions of those involved in the artistic practice processes supported by the place. Interactions between the many and various musicians who frequented this place however, led to prolific and substantial artistic artefacts being produced, and some carried encoded traces of the place itself even if those traces could not be explicitly identified by those that produced them.

The ritualistic performance of the song ‘Closing Time’ had a strong effect on those who participated in its regular performance. In one sense a ‘space’ became available during its performance and participants felt connected to each other and to the collected elements that facilitated its performance. Any universal view of the nature of what this space constitutes is contestable, but it can be seen more clearly by looking into the circumstances of its production and reception on which this space was contingent. The songwriter’s history of political commentary and his interest in Aboriginal equity alludes to a deeper narrative being presented in songs whose lyrics are less explicitly political. Through his intimate connection and strong identification with the place, songs by him are perceived in light of his history with songs and with the place. This coupled with the identification with place the song elicited in the minds of those who joined in performances led to what I have argued is a particular \textit{habitus of listening} (Becker, 2004) forming at the place, or, in another view, a complete sense of \textit{communitas} (Turner, 1969) being experienced by those present.

In taking a focussed look at various aspects of five songs written and recorded by bands closely identified with the Sandringham, several elements within each song showed something of the cultural interplay prevalent at the site at the time. These manifestations could point to a circularity, where evidence should be expected because these were artefacts of the place.
The artefacts are separate entities however, uncollected and unanalysed until now, their only linking aesthetic being that they are popular songs from a particular time. They differ in many ways from each other too. ‘Closing Time’s’ structural simplicity and ease of remembering sits against ‘Ring of Fire’s’ chordal complexity and musical dexterity. ‘The Ballad of Lester Walker’ is seamlessly presented, a rich recording of mainly acoustic instruments whereas ‘R’n’R band and SOB’ is a rushed recording job of electric enthusiasm. ‘Railhead’ presents a sonic assault but seems to elicit a dream-like quality through the repetition of the thematic high ostinato, and unique amongst these other works in timbral sphere more akin to early Birthday Party recordings.

Some could be called ‘ballads’ but ‘Ring of Fire’ is pure comedy and ‘Railhead’ tragedy. Yet each in some way, either in their recorded realisation, tonal quality, lyrics or performativity evoke a sense of the place that supported their realisation. The proximity of a supporting business facility that shared the ethos of the Sandringham, Troy Horse Studios had a strong influence on the production of sonic artefacts through the supply of rehearsal space, recording equipment, gear storage, equipment repair and supply, and at times, the funding of cassette and later CD releases. The symbiotic relationship between these two places offered musicians more opportunities to pursue artistic outcomes than if either business was located further away. Troy Horse’s business model, founded as a musician’s co-operative, mirrored the operation of the Sandringham in that community ownership of the place was actively encouraged by its Managing Director Chris McBurnie.

The symbiotic relationship of these two places is worthy of further and deeper study, for by seeing how these businesses operated in tandem, more successful modes of relationship between supportive cultural institutions could be better understood and implemented. By looking at these circumstances, of the lives of the band members and songwriters, and those who actively supported their artistic productions, a better understanding of the historical significance of the place (and places) to the national popular music-making culture also emerges.
Conclusions – “I was 25… I’m like 42, I’d really love to be playing at the Sando”

As I contemplate the long process that brought this document into being, my memories of the Sandringham hotel have been shifted. Enthusiasm and the opportunity drove the research. The enthusiasm I felt for the place was supported by the enthusiasm shown by the interviewees, who all offered their time, memories and the rare pieces of memorabilia replicated here. As the above quote acknowledges most of the musicians interviewed would “love to be playing” (G. Maynard, personal communication, Oct 2, 2008) in the old hotel today. The act of collecting these narratives adds to the collected repertory of knowledge about music-making in an Australian urban context. This thesis therefore addresses the gap in the literature available on local popular music-making history, a point recently made by several cultural studies scholars:

*Historically, the dominant move has been to focus on ‘Australian popular music’ in the same way that historical studies have privileged Australian history with local histories being relegated to a subgenre* (Bennett, Stratton, & Peterson, 2008: 596).

In response to this the study offers a detailed analysis of a local music-making place and explores how the people who closely identified with the place negotiated the social, economic and political elements at play on a local level. Further than this the analysis of the narratives produced results that either confirmed or called into question ideas about how music-making happens in a local place. This study explored issues of ‘identity’, ‘community’, ‘ritual’ and ‘place’ in the formation, eighteen year life and death of a local popular music-making culture situated at a particular place and time.
Shifting Identities through Place

These elements became evident throughout the interviews in various ways, and difficulties arose around clarifying the specific ideas dominating the actions and participatory flows in and through the place. In relation to issues of identity it was clear that my methodologically imposed identity markers (owner/manager, staff, performer, patron) were in practice more fluid and interconnected than first thought. As the site employed many musicians, people identified as performers were found to have spent significant time working behind the bar. Engagement as a staff member was found to have had a profound effect on personal musical practices, due in no small part to the proximity of the stage to the bar. Staff talked directly to performers during performances and this facilitated close relationships between practicing musicians and musician staff.

Also, people identified as patrons pursued an interest in music through their connection with the site, sometimes forming bands and eventually playing there. Their access to the infrastructure needed to perform was enhanced through their connection to the place, many receiving gigs due to friendships formed in their time as patrons. In a similar way, managers performed in bands on certain occasions, particularly in bands formed from staff to celebrate venue milestones (like the Sweet Sixteen two months of gigs). These bands were given names indicative of their origin, like “Staffies” and “The Sandringhamsters”. Musicians and off-duty staff patronised the hotel often and this breakdown of specific identifiable roles of engagement points to a prevailing ethos of equanimity operating at the Sandringham hotel at the time.

The Sandringham Hotel, during the time covered by the study, became a place where boundaries of engagement were perceived as nullified, and action was undertaken with the shared conception that social, economic, or artistic outcomes would be valued equally within the community. In this way the community that gathered at the Sandringham operated like a ‘Bund’ (Hetherington, 1998: 93) with the architectural structure providing the shared locale necessary for identification within the group. This view was contested at times, and rare stories of these conflicts (see ‘Conflict
within Community’ in chapter 2) reaffirmed interviewees’ connection to this idea and to the place as a space where this ethos of perceived equanimity prevailed. This finding is in contrast to evidence of strict stratification within other music-based sub-cultural groups (Fonarow, 2006). Value was expressed by participants in the way they felt part of the community, including feelings of enjoyment and safety in visiting and performing, and their expressions of identity through bodily participation in ritual actions. Thus the participants could be perceived to be operating in an ‘emotional community’ (Maffesoli, 1996), bound together by these shared feelings. These feelings led participants to view hierarchical distinctions between performers, managers, staff and patrons as less important than otherwise, and explicit and implicit examples of this were evident in most interviews.

‘Scene’ and ‘Pathways’

Criticism could be made of the my avoidance of a more substantial engagement with subcultural theory and this is largely supportable, but there are clear reasons for this. I have deliberately avoided questions of subcultural meaning and socio-political positions ascribable to the place and the participants because many theorists (Webb, 2004; Bennett, 2004; Bennett, Stratton & Peterson, 2008 to name a few) have already dealt with unsupportable theories of class and ethnic boundaries in popular music producing and consuming communities. These theories have attempted to ground broader areas of musical engagement, areas described by stylistic or larger geographic boundaries. As Straw’s (1991) writing has pointed out, the notion of ‘scene’ becomes more useful to popular music researchers than more restrictive subcultural descriptors. ‘Scene’ avoids notions of class and ethnicity, but importantly for this study, also avoids localised articulations in that it naturally becomes inclusive of a multiplicity of sites (local, global and virtual) (Peterson and Bennett, 2004) in its broad sweep. Looking at the Sandringham through a notion of ‘scene’ becomes problematic because we are bounded by a particular ‘space’. Existent literature, if discussing ‘local’ scenes, concentrates on stylistic collectives that meet at several places, or participant engagements that cover larger geographic areas. Looking for a ‘scene’ operating at the Sandringham opens much deeper questions, and opinions from interviewees varied widely.
Rangan: It wasn’t just a uniform place where people all dressed the same or voted the same. It certainly wasn’t one scene, it wasn’t that at all and I like it about that. (N. Rangan, personal communication, May 23, 2008).

This view sits at odds with Straw’s original view of what a scene encompasses. Rangan’s concern is with the people, not the music (or perhaps not just the music). Straw defines a *musical* scene as follows:

\[
\textit{A musical scene, in contrast, is the cultural space in which a range of musical practices coexist, interacting with each other within a variety of processes of differentiation, and according to widely varying trajectories of change and cross-fertilization.} \quad (\text{Straw, 1991b: 373})
\]

The musical scene in Sydney at the time was acknowledged in interviews. Kirsty Lenthal recalls the Hopetoun Hotel in Surrey Hills closing for a time, and how the musicians who relied on that site started to become regular performers at the Sandringham.

Like it was the Hoey (Hopetoun Hotel) closing down that created this whole, or sort of hole in the scene as well where people like Kim Salmon and Tex and all them, they used to hang out at the Hoey. And so there was this whole sort of down time where those bands that they were playing in were looking for places to play. You know, we had the ‘Dirty Three’ and Kim Salmon started playing there quite regularly, doing his solo thing. (K. Lenthal, personal communication, July 17 and 23, 2007)

The ‘scene’ mentioned here covers the inner Sydney band pubs, and as way of binding the ‘varying trajectories’ across the city, it works well in this context. For the most part, and this comes directly from the project’s methodology, interviewees’ expression of a ‘scene’ related directly to their personal experiences viewed from an historical perspective. As Lena Minutillo said,

Minutillo: It was a pretty huge time of my adult life, that whole time around that scene and time, definitely, definitely. Like I said, because I hadn’t been living on this side of the city for long, it kind of gave me a real footprint into the area and made it really feel like home and like I was part of something and I belonged to a group. There’s that sense of belongingness
that most of us want, like there’s a feel like we fit in or belong. (L. Minutillo, personal communication, Aug 9, 2007)

‘Scene’ here is linked with the time and with her feelings about the time. It encompasses feelings of ‘belongingness’ strong enough to turn the urban space into “home”. This calls into question Straw’s definition of ‘scene’ particularly when focusing on ‘space’, and it leads to a more open understanding that includes the interconnectedness of the participants and how shared experience builds the ‘space’ they now recall. Addressing ‘space’ through ‘scene’ falls short, in my view. This leads me to ask whether the perspective we take dictates the understanding we gain in projects like this. Because we are looking at a specific place through the recollections of participants, broader concepts like ‘space’ and ‘scene’ avoid consistent definition. Each interviewee has their view, and as a researcher of a place that is worthy of attention (and has avoided attention until now), the validity of multiple views must be accepted.

How then can a unified understanding of that space come into being? Finnegan (1989) proposes a view that includes ‘shared practices’ in processes of coming together to play music. “Local musicians are linked not just by shared views or emotions but by social practices”, (pg305) and within the confines of the Sandringham walls, these shared practices were concentrated, elevated to rituals by daily practice. Inclusion in these practices at the Sandringham was not predicated on “shared views” however, as Rangan points out above, but they did constitute “known and regular routes.” (1989: 305) Thus Finnegan’s concept of ‘pathways’ becomes useful here. Like ‘pathways’ operate in her study, the shared practices at the Sandringham were well travelled, and as documented in Chapter 3 (The Stage at the Sando) they had “symbolic depth. (pg306) However, whereas Finnegan found the pathways “part of existing cultural forms,” (pg307) the rituals at the Sandringham were established as part of the operation of the site, specific to the site, and when the architecture was substantially changed, the rituals (and therefore the community of participants) ceased to exist. Future research could better identify how ‘space’ and ‘scene’ exist together, mapping ways people interact in spaces and build scenes.
Community Identity and Ownership

I found that the interviewees closely identified with the community expressed a sense of ownership over the site. This sense of ownership of the place by the people who frequented the site was encouraged by the deliberate management principles of Warren Spooner who decided to begin live music events there, and partly through his decision to book bands who had connections to the local area. Spooner encouraged bands and their friends to ‘dress’ the place, bringing furniture from home and these acts of personalisation led to a greater sense of personal connection to the site. Subsequent to him leaving, around 1990, the lax management attitude of his ex-partner who took control of the place, Sandy Spooner, allowed the people who had built a close affinity with the site to step in and claim ownership. They expressed this by investing time and funds in remodelling the back yard of the hotel.

Musicians interviewed for this study expressed a sense of ownership over the stage, having been required to build the structure prior to performing from it. A connection could be drawn between the expressed sense of ownership and the way many interviewees felt the place became an extension of their home space. In an interview published with Sandringham identified musicians prior to this study (Blunt, 2001) a feeling of finding ‘home’ was spoken of when they entered the hotel. This ‘home’ feeling was replicated in interviews conducted for this study, and by people who identified not only as musicians, but also as regular patrons and staff. The place became available to close identification therefore, and musicians felt comfortable socialising and working there which in turn supported their artistic practice and outcomes.

This study includes a discussion of the physical elements of a productive music-making culture situated in a particular place. In further research I hope to continue looking closely at places where people gather to produce and experience live music. Currently, Sydney has a burgeoning underground (legal and illegal) venue scene, with instances of domestic spaces being used to host live music. The electro-acoustic improvisation scene in Sydney utilises this loose network actively, yet remains unsurveyed. Close research of these networks may lead to a better understanding of how productive cultural spaces can be identified or instigated, and supported.
Rituals building Community Identification

One way in which people built their connection to the place was through embodied participation in rituals instigated and maintained at the site. As discussed above, musicians connected with the performance platform by the ritualistic actions of moving the milk crates and pieces of wood from their storage area in the men’s toilet each evening. The process was performative in itself and due to the small size of the venue was witnessed and commented on by those present. The insider knowledge of the correct formation of the stage was seen as a barrier to the inside of a scene by some but the notion of a scene being operational at the site is problematic as discussed earlier. This shared practice was believed by interviewees to undercut any pretensions to superiority visiting musicians might have had. Some musicians interviewed held the process and their involvement in the ritual as a badge of honour, a sign of acceptance by the place itself and therefore by the community that gathered at that place. Knowledge of the correct building process was ascribed to musicians seen as closely identified with the site by other interviewees. Participation in, and witnessing of the process built a shared connection with those present at the site and the nightly replication of this process further embedded a sense of connection and identification with the place.

Weekly regular gigs by bands were a feature of the way in which patrons and staff chose to identify with the site. Through these regular shows it can be seen how “pub rock acts as a primary site for the interaction of popular music with local structures of feeling” (Bennett, 1997: 107). Bands that maintained regular shows included the Shout Brothers (Sundays late-1980s to 1998), Roaring Jack (Thursdays mid-1980s to early 1990s), Paris Green (Mondays late 1980s to mid-1990s) and the duo Gruesome Twosome (Tuesdays early 1990s to 1996), and many interviewees positioned their memories in relation to these regular shows. By visiting on regular nights patrons recognised each other in the small space and this shared connection through music and the particular musician’s practices led to a close identification with the place and the people in the place.
Place Inside and Outside

The internal space at the Sandringham had a critical influence on the way musicians and audience members interacted during and after music-making events. Described variously as “weird” and “all very, very strange”, the configuration of stage and bar offered proximity to performances but provided a comfortable playing area, although small. This proximity allowed access to the “inside” of performances. The position of the bar included staff in performances. Overall, the effect was of a levelling of the perceived hierarchies inherent in music performances.

Local infrastructure that supported music-making practices, in particular Troy Horse Studios, relocated to an adjacent building and this move facilitated the building of the productive arts culture. As Webb (2004) found in the city of Bristol, and Straw (2004) in Manchester and Montreal, having supportive businesses close by that are open to similar cultural activities enhances the productivity of the scenes developed there. Troy Horse began as a musician’s co-operative and as a successful business, now offering rehearsal rooms, posters and merchandise, CD duplication and printing, as well as music gear storage (and other services), is worthy of more focused study.

An ethnographic study could map the flows of musical activity in and through the business, leading to a better understanding of the operation of culturally oriented management practices. Its co-operative business model led to bands gaining access to a range of services normally restricted to more financially successful groups, generally ones supported by mainstream (or aligned independent) record companies. For a time the company operated a recording facility (as well as the services listed above) and a record label from premises directly across the road from the Sandringham hotel. Many bands that played at the Sandringham regularly stored gear there and rehearsed there. In a two-way relationship, the Sandringham Hotel borrowed microphones, microphone stands and leads, and other gear from the company at no charge and at short notice, and this proximity to the supply of live music-making equipment ensured performances could continue that would otherwise
have had to cease. Their Managing Director felt the places shared a similar ethos, based on the co-operative model that Troy Horse had started with.

**Community with Diversity**

Despite links between scene and musical genre in popular music literature, (Kruse, 2003; Mitchell, 1996; Stahl, 2004; Webb, 2004) this study found that the music-making community at the Sandringham did not support one identifiable musical style. If there was a preference expressed it was for openness to all genres and this was reflected in the inclusive social attitude of the community in general at the pub. The line-up chosen for the Sweet Sixteen (Sixteenth anniversary of live performances) two month series of gigs provided testament to this with acoustic folk-rock, heavy rock, cabaret jazz, modern be-bop jazz, Christian mainstream rock, punk, thrash and country/rockabilly styles represented in the extensive list of bands playing.

Recordings were made of these shows and further research into the location of these and transferring to digital media would be productive and useful in surveying the range of music being produced in live performances at the time.

**Changing Communities**

Although this research did not seek to document or discuss the socio-economic circumstances, attitudes or history of the people closely identified with the Sandringham, participant’s recognition of class distinction was evident. One manager expressed dismay at people from Sydney’s north shore (and more wealthy) suburbs beginning to frequent the hotel in the mid-1990s. This signalled the change in demographics evident in the surrounding suburbs (Homan, 2000). Another regular patron and musician felt compelled to keep secret his daily work in the city’s financial sector due to the prevailing “working class” ethos. This ‘working class’ feel was echoed by many interviewees, but may have been ascribed to the site due to the poor nature of its infrastructure, having not had any noticeable renovations for at least 30 or 40 years. Most interviewees also felt the place held historical significance
and further research could trace these feelings, linking them to changes in musician practices brought about by the then burgeoning digital music production processes.

**Insider Status**

The “balance of power” (Mishler, 1991:119) that underlies traditional research interview practices could be said to have been negated prior to the research being formulated. My position as an insider, along with the prevailing culture of equanimity evidenced throughout the narratives, undercuts this difference in relationship. It could also be argued that the high number of tertiary educated participants in this research also contributed to the negation of any perception of the interviewer being in a more powerful position within the interview relationship. Issues of my insider status arose most presciently when interviewees discussed issues of conflict in which I had played a part. The decision to include the personal narrative was not taken lightly, but I feel it adds to the evidence and any recriminations will be mine to resolve. My personal feelings about the place and time could not be avoided, and the research could be judged to have fallen short of a more objective analysis of the large amount of information offered by the interviewees. However, access to the interviewees and the relaxed way interviews were conducted added a great deal of contextual information and this aided the analysis of the information greatly. Personal knowledge of the site became essential to the better understanding of the contexts at play within the research as a whole.
References


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Tovey, J. (2009). Howls of protest as Hopetoun shuts, *Sydney Morning Herald*.


Recordings


Photographs


All other photographs remain the property of either Kirsty Lenthal, Harry Ree or Mark Hyland. Used with kind permission.
Appendix A

Areas of investigation for the interviews

Musicians
When did you first play at the Sandringham Hotel?
How did the venue differ from other venues you played?
Did the your engagement with the venue influence your musical work? How?
Did you socialise at the Sando?
Have you written songs about the pub? Will you play them for me?
Can you recall any incidents during gigs that speak about the uniqueness of the venue?
Did you meet and/or collaborate with people you met at the Hotel?
Were production values a priority at the venue/what were the playing conditions like?

Hotel owner/manager
Why did you decide to start/continue the Hotel as a 7-day live music venue?
Were there problems with this regarding police or the local community?
How were these problems approached or overcome?
Why live music rather than poker machines?
Did you enjoy the colourful patrons/are there any you recall?
Tell me about the staff you hired. Were there any specific attributes you looked for?
Are there any memorable bands/incidents that you’d like to discuss?

Hotel entertainment/bar staff
How did you get the job?
How did you choose entertainment for the venue?
Did the area/staff/patrons influence the entertainment you hired?
Do you recall any overly successful or unsuccessful bands?
How many demo tapes did you receive from groups wanting to play the venue?
Were production values a priority at the venue/did anyone complain or help to improve the playing conditions?
Was the job stressful/enjoyable/social?
Who were your favourite performers and why?

**Audience members**
Can you remember going to the Sandringham first time?
What was your feeling on that occasion?
Who did you see perform there?
Did you visit the pub at times there weren’t bands on? Why?
Did you form continuing friendships during your time at the Hotel?
Are there any memorable incidents or performances you’d like to talk about?
Do you look for similar attributes in a local Hotel now? Where?
Did your engagement with music change by your interactions at the Sando?
Appendix B

Information Sheet
Urban Site, National Music

This study seeks to answer key questions that relate to the music making that took place at the Sandringham Hotel prior to its closure as a seven nights a week venue and subsequent major refurbishment. Can a unique culture can be ‘seen’ or understood in relation to this place at this time? Was the ‘feel’ of this venue part of the people who frequented the site, or was it more to do with the staff and their attitudes towards the workplace? Were there signs of the culture in the way the venue was set up, its architecture, or did the bands that played each evening have a greater influence? By interviewing you and others who visited the site I hope to see a story of this culture emerge.

You are being invited to participate in the project by being interviewed at a place and time convenient to you. The interview will take about one hour. Your responses will be verbal but may also be musical, and also may include any recordings or documents you feel would add to the project. The interview questions will be open-ended and will be offered to you prior to the interview. While retaining your name on papers and conference presentations which result from this project would strengthen the project, this is not necessary and you can indicate on the Consent Form your decision in this regard.

By participating in this interview process, you are helping to write a history that seems to be absent from the Australian contemporary music scene. This is a rare look at a specific venue at a specific time and you, along with other staff members, musicians and patrons are helping to write this history.

If you are willing to take part in the project, please respond by email or telephone. Any request for anonymity will be respected, and if at anytime you’d like to withdraw please feel free. Transcripts of our interview will be available soon after recording for you to read and verify. Please read the consent form carefully and add your signature. Thankyou for your participation.
If you have further questions, please contact Brendan Smyly (post-graduate student) Music Area, University of Western Sydney, Locked Bag 1797, Penrith Sth, NSW 1797; Phone 0431 957 682 or email bsmly@hotmail.com.

NOTE: This project has been approved by the University of Western Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee or Panel (indicate Committee or Panel). The Approval Number is …………………. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Ethics Committee/Panel through the Research Ethics Officers (tel: 02 4736 0883 or 4736 0884). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.
Appendix C

Consent Form

Written Consent


I agree to take part in a research project that aims to investigate the events and social interactions that took place at the Sandringham Hotel, Newtown between 1981 and 1998. I understand that this interview will be recorded and transcribed, and that a transcript will be provided for my perusal and amendment if requested. Any recordings or documents that would add to the project are used with my agreement. I understand that the information gathered may be used in papers and articles submitted to academic journals or presented to academic conferences. I understand that any request for anonymity will be respected.

Name ____________________________________________

Date of birth ________________________________

Signature: __________________________________________

Please initial one of the following:

I agree to my name being used in the study..........................

I do not wish my name to be used in the study......................

_______________________________