“You’re Not Strangers If You Like the Same Band”:
Small Venues, Music Scenes, and the Live Music Ecology

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Declaration

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged; and, ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

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– Samuel Whiting, 7 March 2019
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– Sam Whiting, 7 March 2019
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Abstract

Small live music venues are essential components of the live music ecology. They serve as entry-level performance spaces for musicians, providing opportunities for up-and-coming bands, as well as sites of socialisation for music scene participants. Small venues are fundamental to the sustainability of local music scenes yet their social and cultural value is often overlooked in popular music studies.

This thesis analyses the intersection between local music scenes and the live music ecology in Melbourne, Australia, through case studies of two small venues: The Old Bar and The Tote. It responds to the research question: *what is the social and cultural value of The Old Bar and The Tote in the live music ecology of Melbourne’s inner-north?* The study uses data gleaned from approximately 30 face-to-face interviews with participants actively involved in the music scene, in conjunction with participant observation and historical research on each venue and the surrounding suburbs.

Small live music venues rely on complex systems of cultural and social capital in order to bring revenue into each venue space. Throughout this thesis I account for and illustrate the non-economic value of small venues through an analysis of how social, cultural, and symbolic capital are mobilised by individuals and the venues themselves. This positions these venues in the broader live music ecology of Melbourne’s inner-north and influences their role as social hubs and performance spaces for music scene participants.

This thesis makes specific use of Pierre Bourdieu’s theories of capital, habitus, and field to explicate the role of small live music venues within the live music ecology. Bourdieu’s theoretical apparatus is utilised to illustrate
how these venues mobilise and convert non-economic forms of value into revenue, and to unpack the power relations demonstrated in interactions between scene participants, small venue workers, and the venue spaces themselves. This utilisation of Bourdieu and his theoretical apparatus is an ongoing subsidiary project of the thesis, as I assert that much of the ‘work’ that small live music venues ‘do’ as niche spaces of cultural production is intangible, and thus difficult to measure in quantitative terms. Therefore, Bourdieu’s alternative forms of capital are most useful in illustrating the social and cultural value of The Old Bar and The Tote in the live music ecology of Melbourne’s inner-north, articulating this value in its most effective form.

This thesis is presented in six chapters. Chapter One introduces my topic and outlines my research question, case studies, methodology, data collection and analysis methods, limitations, contribution to the field, and thesis structure. Following this introduction the key concepts of ‘scene’, the ‘live music ecology’, ‘place’, ‘space’, ‘the everyday’, and various Bourdieusian forms of capital (cultural, social, symbolic etc.) are defined, along with a discussion of gentrification and its effect on Melbourne’s night-time economy (Chapter Two). My data analysis spans three distinct chapters. A discussion of ‘place’ (Chapter Three) grounds my research in materiality and a discernible setting, while a discussion of social, cultural and other Bourdieusian forms of capital demonstrates how such intangibles are regularly converted into economic capital by venue booking agents and other social actors in the live music ecology (Chapter Four).

Both ‘scene’ and the ‘live music ecology’ are useful descriptors of musical practice that complement each other, and both are utilised throughout this thesis to contextualise the social and cultural value of small
venues and to explain how this value is operationalised in their role as the foundation of a city’s live music ecology. This live music ecology includes the institutions, organisations, events, and venue spaces that form the materiality of local music scenes, whereas ‘scene’ encompasses the everyday social practices that make up engagement with music, outlined via a discussion of scene participants and the various roles they perform throughout the local music scene of Melbourne’s inner-north (Chapter Five). Chapter Five also presents case studies of two Melbourne bands, Gold Class and Camp Cope, which demonstrate the value of small live music venues as social hubs and performance sites for emerging musicians. This opens up small live music venues to forms of value beyond the purely financial, positioning them as producers of grassroots culture and the building blocks of a sustainable live music ecology, as summarised in my conclusion (Chapter Six).

This thesis analyses the small venues of Melbourne’s inner-north, gauging the value of these venues as sites of social exchange, discourse, and the generation of multiple forms of capital, mobilised in exchange for the revenue that contributes to the sustainability of Melbourne’s live music culture. The social and cultural value of participation in music scenes is therefore one of their most valuable aspects, and one that small live music venues play an essential role in facilitating. As a contribution to the literature on Australian music scenes and ethnographies of small live music venues this thesis determines the substantial effect small venues have on local music scenes and the live music ecology, their greater social and cultural value, and their significance within the realms of cultural production. Finally, a multi-sited investigation of this kind, focusing on the intersection of music scenes and the live music ecology is novel, and serves as a unique contribution to the study of live music in Australia.
Chapter 1 – Introduction

As I lock up my bike, I cast my gaze to the chalkboard listing tonight’s bands. The Old Bar in Melbourne’s inner-suburb of Fitzroy is an unassuming building, painted black with simple signage featuring the venue’s name and its trademark symbol; the silhouette of a guitar (see Figure 1). I cross Johnston Street, which joins Fitzroy with the neighbouring suburb of Collingwood. The loud sounds of the band penetrate the closed doors and spill out onto the street. As I approach I envision the musicians facing a gathering crowd just around the corner from the venue’s small entrance. I am greeted casually by The Old Bar’s bouncers, who act as if they know me, although tonight they don’t. But I look like someone they should know, so I enter unquestioned. On the other side of the venue’s door, I am welcomed by The Old Bar’s long-sitting door-man Matty, who pauses from reading his comic book to take my cash. I don’t always pay entry, but tonight I am here to see the bands rather than just socialise so I’m happy to support these musicians, knowing that my money will be going to them.

As I turn to the bar, I realise I know at least half the people seated there. We pass jokes around as we greet each other, talking with excitement about tonight’s line-up. The venue is dimly-lit and the walls behind the bar are covered with a collage of images, drawings, and visual jokes, including the photo-shopped face of Dan McKay—Old Bar manager and drummer of tonight’s headliner, The Nation Blue—oddly plastered onto the bald head of his bandmate, Tom Lyngcoln. It is an in-joke that only those closely associated with the venue would appreciate; a pastiche of two local musicians that pokes fun at both.

I attempt to get the attention of the one bartender I know well, as my chances of a discounted drink are improved if she serves me. Ordering a beer, I walk through the band room, pausing to briefly listen. Unfamiliar with the opening act, I continue through to the courtyard and am immediately accosted by a cast of characters, some old friends, others mere acquaintances unseen outside of these walls. Tonight’s gig has been organised as a
birthday present for local musician and regular Amy Muir. Having played in bands for years, tonight’s line-up is curated in her honour and mainly features her friends. This sort of event is indicative of The Old Bar, which toes a fine-line between live music venue and community space for the local music scene of Melbourne’s inner-north.

– Reflections from fieldnotes, 19 October 2018, 7pm
Figure 1 - The Old Bar: Exterior facing Johnston Street, Fitzroy (illustration by Sianne van Abkoude)
Chapter 1 - Introduction

This research project documents, discusses, and analyses the social and cultural value of two small live music venues, The Old Bar and The Tote, located on the same street in the inner-northern Melbourne suburbs of Fitzroy and Collingwood respectively (see Figure 2). It responds to the research question: what is the social and cultural value of The Old Bar and The Tote in the live music ecology of Melbourne’s inner-north? Through these case studies I examine the role of social and cultural capital amongst the music scenes that are accommodated by these spaces, the role of place in establishing a sense of space, and the live music ecology that small venues such as The Old Bar and The Tote provide a grassroots foundation for. As a musician and regular scene participant myself, The Old Bar is a space where I have felt comfortable for many years. I often performed at the venue and was led to feel like part of a community. Over years of going to shows and working at The Old Bar as a bartender, it really started to feel like home.

For myself and other music scene participants, small live music venues such as The Old Bar are spaces for the forming of identity and belonging beyond simple explanation. I needed to find a way of documenting and conveying why. This place had changed me. It provided a sense of belonging; a new lease on life in a city that seemed intense and interesting, paving the way into a scene that was wildly more engaging and limitless than my previous experiences in Brisbane (my hometown). At the same time, small venues like this have come under threat. The Tote Hotel (down the road from The Old Bar) reopened under new management after harsh liquor licensing laws forced its closure, yet new policies and discussions around venues have overlooked the value that I have seen in these spaces; an intangible quality of community. As someone in a unique position to access this community and document its value, I felt compelled to explore this further. It just seemed too important. So here it is.
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A snapshot of two venues that meant a lot to me in my formative years and continue to hold significance for thousands of emerging artists, musicians, and those that admire them.

Figure 2 - Map of Inner Fitzroy and Collingwood featuring The Old Bar and The Tote
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As small venues, The Old Bar and The Tote maintain intimate atmospheres. Although these venues play host to a broad array of acts covering a range of musical genres and sub-genres, the overall musical aesthetic of these spaces is decidedly guitar-centric. However, an accurate understanding of these venues requires a more holistic perspective than simply a study of genres. It is important to look beyond the music to the vernacular cultures that these venues house in order to adequately grasp their significance.

The Old Bar and The Tote are both regarded as clubhouses amongst their regular patrons and staff, a point that I explore through a discussion of each venue’s component spaces and their relevance to the social functioning of each venue as a whole. My case studies encompass both intra-venue and inter-venue spaces, such as the front bars and band rooms of the venue spaces themselves, as well as the surrounding streets and neighbourhoods that make up Fitzroy and Collingwood. By analysing these spaces and places I demonstrate how each venue is made up of both overlapping and discrete activities or routines, and how these function in similar and differing ways between the venue spaces themselves, working to reproduce and disrupt the same types of experiences and meanings across spatial boundaries. Each venue can be seen as part of a broader field, a transient community with its own social pathways, which serves to give structure to a ‘moment’ in the local music scene and form to the live music ecology.

This thesis begins with the premise that small live music venues function as meeting places for musicians and those involved in music scenes. To analyse how and why this happens, I examine the venue spaces themselves, their materiality, and how space influences experiences of live music. My focus on human interactions and exchange evokes Will Straw’s
definition of ‘scene’ (2001, 1991), how this fits in relation to Melbourne’s ‘live music ecology’ (Behr et al 2016; Frith 2012), as well as social, cultural, and symbolic capital as they appear in both creative and everyday settings (Bourdieu 1997, 1984; Threadgold 2015). My research also reflects the results of a recent parliamentary inquiry into the New South Wales music sector, which emphasised the value of small venues for the incubation and support of new and emerging talent (New South Wales Parliament 2018, pp. 41-50), and the importance of a “complex music ecosystem with many moving parts” (New South Wales Parliament 2018, pp. 9-20). By focussing on the micro and inter-personal relations that occur in these spaces, my research explores how small venues function as social hubs, comparing The Old Bar (see Figure 3) and The Tote (see Figure 4) via ethnographic case study research.

**Venues as Social Clubs**

Upon moving to Melbourne in 2011 the majority of my social connections in the city had been made through my involvement in Australia’s independent rock scene. My Brisbane band Nikko had decided to relocate to Melbourne and were booked for a residency at The Old Bar. With a gig every week, this was a solid run of shows for an interstate group, the result of a rapport we had established with the owners of The Old Bar over many years of touring to Melbourne.
Figure 3 - The Old Bar: Band room interior with band performing

Figure 4 - The Tote: Band room stage with band performing
The Old Bar always had a gig for us because we played the kind of music that The Old Bar’s owners wanted to hear and support. On top of the weekly gig, I got a job behind the bar. This was surprising as not only was my band from out of town, I had never worked in a bar before. All of the professional opportunities I was afforded upon my arrival in Melbourne were premised on the acquaintance I shared with The Old Bar’s owners; my social capital. Much of this was built on my cultural capital in Australia’s indie rock scene. Further, many of my initial social connections in Melbourne were also formed via The Old Bar, as both venue staff and as an active, local musician. Over my first few months in Melbourne, I began to recognise the value of social capital in the context of the independent music scene. It seemed especially pertinent in small venues, as though everyone that worked at The Old Bar was involved in the local music scene in some way. This encouraged me to consider the role that social and cultural capital play in local music scenes, and what this contributes to the live music ecology as a whole.

At a glance, the small live music venues of Melbourne house a transient scene of musicians, patrons, staff and enthusiasts who assume various roles, moving between and beyond these roles as their lifestyles change. There is an assumption here that these venues offer little permanence; each performance is an ephemeral event that has little impact on the venue, the local music scene, or the resulting live music culture (Behr et al 2016, p. 20). If we are to take this further, venues function simply as performance sites. From this perspective, live music venues offer no more than a stage upon which a musician stands and an audience gazes; what occurs in this setting, albeit significant, has little lasting effect on the venue. Although this may be true of
some venues—those that operate on a larger, more impersonal scale—the small venues encountered in my fieldwork offer a different story.

To adequately understand the importance of small live music venues, ideas of place, memory, and belonging must be considered. This adds to an appreciation for the nuances of venue spaces, the sociality and materiality of which are fundamental to their status in the live music ecology; “[t]he pub as a local live music venue is therefore much more than merely an undervalued site of creativity—it is a central place in life histories, a place of emotional investment, transition, and transient community, of coming of age” (Gallan and Gibson 2013, p. 176). This positions small live music venues in a broader cultural narrative of belonging. Such themes inform live music culture in Melbourne as a whole, as well as understandings of each venue as experienced, told, and imagined by the individuals that engage with them.

Melbourne – Australia’s ‘live music capital’

Melbourne is Australia’s second most populous city. The capital of Australia’s small south-eastern state of Victoria, it was built on the back of a mid-1800s gold-rush, was previously a major manufacturing city, and has since embraced a post-industrial service sector economy. Melbourne is known for its unpredictable weather, fine dining, café culture, large cultural sector, progressive politics, and combination of historic and modern architecture. Its identity is distinct and is grounded in its love of Australian Rules football\(^1\), which has its origins in Victoria; its influential European and Asian migrant population, whose food and culture have shaped the city’s inner-suburbs; and its strong connection to music and the arts, observable in

\(^1\) Australian Rules Football, officially known as Australian football—abbreviated to ‘Aussie rules’ or simply ‘footy’—, is a contact sport played between two teams of 18 players on an oval-shaped field. It is specific to Australia and originated in Melbourne. The sports’ professional league is the Australian Football League.
the programming of both its public institutions and the city’s broader cultural verve.

The social and cultural value of Melbourne’s live music scene has played a major part in the city’s growing reputation as the live music capital of Australia. The city hosts over 73,000 live music performances annually, is home to 553 live music venues, and accommodates an average of over 110,000 live music fans in its venues every Saturday (and Friday) night (Newton and Coyle-Hayward 2018, p. 6). Melbourne’s live music sector also generates approximately AUD$1.42 billion annually, which includes an average Saturday night turnover of AUD$6 million (Newton and Coyle-Hayward 2018, pp. 6-7). With its cosmopolitan inner-suburbs and abundant network of venues, Melbourne has fostered a highly competitive and successful live music ecology, creating demand for high-profile bands and larger audiences. This has resulted in a variety of performance spaces for live music across the city and throughout its surrounding suburbs.

The Tote and The Old Bar

As small independent venues that host an eclectic array of artists and musicians, The Tote and The Old Bar represent a form of night-time leisure, entertainment and drinking space commonly typified as ‘alternative’. These ‘alternative’ nightlife spaces are defined in comparison to ‘mainstream’ and ‘residual’ spaces:

Mainstream nightlife spaces are corporate owned and managed pubs, nightclubs, cafes and styled bars, which come to dominate urban nightscapes. They are increasingly branded and themed, targeting financially lucrative consumer markets and identities. Opposite the mainstream are alternative nightlife spaces. These are usually smaller and independently run examples that cater to specialised youth cultures and identities, often associated with fringe fashion and music, but also diverse ethnicities, sexualities and politics. Residual spaces are the
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traditional pubs, ale houses and taverns with strong community ties that are rapidly disappearing or deteriorating. (Gallan 2015, p. 556)

The Old Bar neatly fits the category of an ‘alternative’ nightlife space. However, due to its long-standing history and iconic status, The Tote straddles the border between alternative and residual drinking space, with an identifiable ‘old-guard’ often mixed in with the venue’s younger patrons. This old guard is represented both onstage and off, with prominent older Australian rock acts such as Warped, The Cosmic Psychos, and The Hard-Ons performing at The Tote on a regular basis. The Tote represents a dichotomy between a more established brand of alternative music—one that has its roots in the grunge and ‘alternative rock’ genres of the 1990s—and a new, independent music scene represented in the eclectic booking policies of venue booking agent Rich Stanley. Interestingly, The Tote’s management are wary of the venue’s transition into a residual drinking space and are eager to combat it by employing young musicians and ensuring that a variety of diverse acts are represented across the venues’ live music events.

The Tote is a performance space for both emerging acts and established bands. The venue hosts live music five nights a week (Wednesday to Sunday), with multiple performance spaces throughout the venue. The Tote’s main band room (see Figure 5) hosts headliners over the weekend, while smaller bands perform in the upstairs band room (see Figure 6).

Sunday afternoon residencies take place in the front bar (see Figure 5). All of these spaces rely on the materiality of the venue to give them form and function. The Tote’s main band room is a purpose built staging area ideal for big production headline acts, with enough room to host around 300 patrons. The front bar however, is poorly designed for hosting bands and is therefore better suited for smaller groups.
Like The Tote, The Old Bar also has afternoon performances on Saturdays and Sundays. These are usually reserved for quieter, acoustic performances. However, The Old Bar is smaller than The Tote, approximately half the size in terms of floor space (see Figure 7). For up-and-coming bands, it is a natural choice for a debut show, most likely on a weeknight. Therefore, The Old Bar can be seen as an entry-level venue in the live music ecology of Melbourne’s inner-north, providing bands with some of their first performance opportunities.

Weeknight and afternoon slots at The Old Bar act as testing grounds for young bands, with front-bar and upstairs shows at The Tote serving a similar purpose. Friday and Saturday nights at The Old Bar are reserved for headline acts and their supports. Therefore, a ‘pecking order’ can be seen between these spaces and the bands that perform there, giving the live music ecology a sense of structure as bands move through these performance spaces.

Melbourne has built a strong reputation for culture and music as part of its collective identity. Its small venues serve as ideal case studies through which to explore the role of the live music ecology and associated music scenes. These venue spaces play an important role in bringing new bands in contact with existing audiences as well as acting as social hubs for music scene participants.

Having introduced the research topic and case study venues, I now move on to a discussion of methodology, the field site, my approach to insider research, case study selection, data collection and analysis, and the limitations of this research, before closing this introduction with an outline of the project’s contribution to the field of popular music studies and an overview of the thesis’s structure.
Figure 5 - The Tote: Downstairs floor plan featuring main band room and front bar
Figure 6 - The Tote: Upstairs floor plan featuring band room

Figure 7 - The Old Bar: Downstairs floor plan featuring front bar (bar servery), band room and stage
Research Methodology

Ethnography is “an immersive method, using the ethnographer’s participation to build a multi-faceted portrayal of the research setting” (Hine 2015, p. 55). In terms of popular music studies, this primarily involves “the observation of and the description (or representation) of cultural practices” (Cooley and Barz 2008, p. 4), specifically musical or music-making practices. My ethnographic approach to fieldwork provided a valuable means of understanding the day-to-day of local music scenes and the live music ecology, aligned with a definition of ethnography as “iterative-inductive research (that evolves in design through the study), drawing on a family of methods… that acknowledges the role of theory as well as the researcher’s own role and that views humans as part object/part subject” (O’Reilly 2005, p. 3). Immersion is a key component of ethnography and formed a large part of my methodology, as I was already an ‘insider’ in the field due to my employment and performance history at both case study venues. Further, as “ethnographic fieldwork requires meaningful face-to-face interaction with other individuals” (Cooley and Barz 2008, p. 4), my fieldwork used a combination of one-on-one interviews with key scene participants and immersive participant observation to inform my final dataset.

Ethnographies of music scenes in British cities such as Ruth Finnegan’s research in Milton Keynes (1989) and Sara Cohen’s ongoing work in Liverpool (2013, 2007, 1991) emphasise the social drive of local music scenes, exploring the day-to-day functioning of these scenes through the lived experiences of amateur and semi-professional musicians. Previous Australian ethnographies of small live music venues have highlighted the role patrons play in imbuing venues with meaning through processes of remembering (Bennett and Rogers 2016a, 2016b; Gallan and Gibson 2013;
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Gallan 2012; Smyly 2010), which emphasise the significance of vernacular culture and cultural capital in place-making (Shorthose 2004; Rahnema 1997). My work builds on these studies and their methodologies, which have either focused on a venue or a collection of venues at a particular point in time.

My approach to ethnography was reflexive, based both on the notion that knowledge is experiential (Pink et al 2016, p. 2), and a definition of ethnography as “keenly aware of experience and of the personal context of experience” (Cooley and Barz 2008, p. 20). The goal of reflexive ethnographers is to “attempt reflexively to understand their positions in ethnographies, including their epistemological stances, their relations to the cultural practices and individuals studied, and their relationships to their own cultural practices” (Cooley and Barz 2008, p. 20). My role as an active participant in the local music scene and an ‘insider’ at The Old Bar and The Tote provided me with privileged knowledge of these spaces. In terms of ethnography this is considered to be an ideal position, as “[t]he more or less explicit goal of thorough ethnographic research is to gain an insider perspective and to collect insider accounts” (O’Reilly 2009, p. 110). I did not have to ingratiate myself as part of the fieldwork process. Throughout my fieldwork, I focused on music scenes that I had ready access to; those that I was already entrenched within. This aided me in gaining a deeper understanding of these spaces. However, I am mindful of my position as an insider and how this has coloured my perception of these venues.

Researching a music scene poses its difficulties, as it “sometimes uncomfortably entwines the ethnographer’s personal and professional identities” (Hine 2015, p. 61). This was reflected in the way that participants interacted with me once they were aware of my role as a researcher, as this new position seemed incongruous to many participants. This aligns with
common difficulties of doing ethnography ‘at home’, wherein “participants are more likely to treat the ethnographer according to pre-conceived categories associated with class, education, gender, and so on” (O’Reilly 2009, p. 112). My transition from a musician and bartender to a postgraduate student of popular music studies highlighted certain distinctions of class and education, as my new role as an early career researcher emphasised my high-level of education. However, my position as an insider in the scene helped to make interviews and other interactions more relaxed.

Critical reflexivity was both a tool that I used to navigate the ethnographic space and a perspective I struggled to maintain. The problem of reflexivity and critical self-reflection is a common one for insider researchers (O’Reilly 2009, p. 113). Over the course of my research, ‘standing back’ from my fieldwork took a literal turn as I withdrew from regular participation and engagement in the local Melbourne music scene in order to gain a better perspective as a researcher. This provided me with the mental space to critique my fieldwork more effectively. Questions of social and cultural capital were raised, specifically the way in which habitus (defined in Chapter Two) positions certain scene participants—namely white male musicians—to engage in the Melbourne live music scene with more comfort than others.

The problem posed by critical reflexivity was weaving such a critique through the broader argument of my thesis, as “[t]he reflexive dimension does not have an identifiable singular impact on the ethnographic account but suffuses the story” (Hine 2015, p. 82). A white male musician myself, my own habitus initially blinded me to the positions of privilege that I held in local music spaces. Such self-interrogation is “widely acknowledged as an important corrective to an erroneous impression that ethnographers
somehow produce objective accounts of pre-existing reality” (Hine 2015, p. 81). My immersion, insider status, and subsequent reflexivity are all integral components of my fieldwork, because only I was able to gain the level of access demonstrated here, and I only could have achieved this dataset, as my experience and connections in the local music scene of Melbourne’s inner-north—my field site—is unique. This thesis represents my own experience of the field, both as an ethnographer and a participant. However, as an insider I found that my own identity in the context of the field site or ‘scene’ became more rigid rather than less throughout the fieldwork process.

The Scene as Site: Multi-Sited Ethnography and Local Music Scenes

In traditional anthropology, the field site is a specific geographic or cultural space. However, “[a]lthough we routinely speak of ‘the field site’ in the singular, the object of study in ethnographic tradition has, in practice, rarely been a tightly bounded geographic space or cultural unit” (Hine 2015, p. 58). While my fieldwork focuses on two distinct live music venues, my field site includes the broader cultural space of Melbourne’s inner-north, specifically its local live music scene. Viewing the field site in this way provides a number of advantages, as “a conception of group boundaries as fluid and situated, brought into being for specific purposes or symbolically constructed… is often the upshot of this form of inquiry” (Hine 2015, p. 59). An understanding of the field site as fluid or ‘multi-sited’ reflects both recent and historical ethnographic research on music scenes (Bennett 2004, 1997; Bennett, Stratton and Peterson 2008; Bennett and Rogers 2016a, 2016b; Peterson and Bennett 2004; Straw 2001, 1991). Further, current ethnographic methodologies sit well with contemporary ideas of music
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scenes, as each account for the fluidity of human behaviour in the postmodern era.

Multi-sited ethnography positions “subjects as differently constituted, as not products of essential unity of difference only, but… in development—displaced, recombined, hybrid in the once popular idiom, alternatively imagined” (Marcus 2012, p. 19). Hybridisation is brought to the fore here, highlighting the incompleteness of ethnography yet accounting for this segmentation. The fluid, open quality of multi-sited ethnography is also found in definitions of music scenes as “a particular state of relations between various populations and social groups” (Straw 1991, p. 379), much like the “system of relations” that is emphasised in definitions of multi-sited ethnography (Marcus 2012, p. 19). By focussing on the relations between sites and subjects, multi-sited ethnography allows for the fluidity of postmodern life that modern definitions of music scenes also rely on (Bennett and Peterson 2004; Bennett 2000; Chaney 1996).

Venue Selection

The two small venues that serve as case studies for this thesis were selected on the following grounds:

1. Their status in Melbourne’s live music ecology, as prominent venues for original live music;
2. Their small audience capacities of between 100 and 500 patrons;
3. Their close proximity to each other (900 metres apart on the same street); and
4. Their central location within Melbourne’s inner-north.
Chapter 1 - Introduction

It should be noted that The Old Bar and The Tote operate on slightly different scales of operation, with the latter occupying a larger geographical space that allows for multiple simultaneous performances within the venue. This difference should not detract from the fact that the sense of connection and similarities between the two venues are clear to those who frequent and operate them. Musician and former bar manager of The Tote Marty Baker commented on these parallels, pointing out that the two venues could even be one and the same:

You could put the Old Bar onto The Tote and it could be the same place. You could connect them together through a doorway and you could walk into The Old Bar and it could be just a fucking extension of The Tote, or The Tote could be an extension of the Old Bar. That’s a good way to think about it. (Marty Baker, interview)

As ‘extensions’ of each other, The Tote and The Old Bar are positioned as encompassing the same ‘social space’ (defined and discussed in Chapter Two). Each are long-standing venues that play a distinct role in Melbourne’s live music ecology and the music scene upon which it is founded.

The Tote’s well-documented financial struggles, closure and subsequent re-opening in the wake of strict liquor licensing laws (Homan 2011a, 2011b; Shaw 2013; Walker 2012) has cemented the venue as an icon in the cultural narrative of Melbourne. A more recent venue, The Old Bar is one of a few small venues in Melbourne that host original live music seven nights a week. Further, the venue’s owners have remained vocal regarding their concerns about gentrification and its role as a harbinger of noise restrictions and early closures (Dowling 2012), while their co-operation with local council has guaranteed them a place in the authorised narrative of Melbourne as a live music city (Yarra City Arts 2015).
Data Collection

My fieldwork involved face-to-face interviews with 34 key scene participants (see Table 1), 18 men and 16 women. These interviews were largely informal, conversational and semi-structured, ranging between 20 to 90 minutes in length. Interview questions (see Appendix A) acted to guide the conversation, rather than as stop-points with rigid answers. I also altered the order of interview questions and prompted the interviewee when needed in order to gain a broader data sample. Interviews were transcribed by a professional transcription service before the data was compiled for analysis. My interview questions focused on the venues, with respondents asked to describe how they experienced the venue on a social level, their key interactions, and the perceived values motivating these interactions.

Participants are self-categorised as musicians, bar staff, music industry professionals (such as publicists, promoters, or journalists), live sound engineers, or venue owners/management (see Table 1). I also included those with a vested professional or personal interest in live music, such as regular venue patrons and local live music enthusiasts. Those enthusiasts without a professional interest in the local music scene are categorised as ‘audience members’, along with all other respondents. Table 1 demonstrates how scene participants span multiple roles, including professional, semi-professional, creative, and social positions. This is indicative of participation in local music scenes, which often takes diverse forms and can encompass multiple, overlapping ‘identities’, demonstrating the intersection between work and play found in music scene participation.
### Table 1 - Table of respondents (featuring participant roles)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Respondents</th>
<th>Musician</th>
<th>Bar Staff</th>
<th>Music Industry Professional</th>
<th>Sound Engineer</th>
<th>Venue Owner/Management</th>
<th>Audience Member</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adam Curley</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah Brasier</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Jarrod Brown</td>
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<tr>
<td>Katie Harrigan</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Matty Chow</td>
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<tr>
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### Table of Interview Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Respondents</th>
<th>Musician</th>
<th>Bar Staff</th>
<th>Music Industry Professional</th>
<th>Sound Engineer</th>
<th>Venue Owner/Management</th>
<th>Audience Member</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Sam Whiting</td>
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<td>✔</td>
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<tr>
<td>‘Snoop’ Mitchell</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>The Tote</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Therese Martschinke</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thomy Sloane</td>
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</tr>
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</table>
I approached participants who were previously known to me either through closed social media messaging, email, or text message. I then employed a snowball sampling method (Coleman 1958; Goodman 1961), starting with around a dozen initial respondents and actively seeking references from this first group for further potential participants. This referral based approach to sampling is particularly useful in the ethnographic study of local music scenes (see Futrell et al 2006; Groce and Cooper 1990). I also asked my friends and colleagues for further referrals, all while aiming to achieve a balanced pool of interviewees in terms of gender.

An indirect result of my data collection methods was that a high proportion of my interviewees had some degree of professional connection to either the local media, live music or hospitality industries. As I initially sourced interviewees from my personal acquaintances—who then referred me to further interview participants—my cohort of interviewees can be seen to reflect somewhat of an ‘in-crowd’ within these venue spaces. Although the experiences of casual punters are recorded and presented throughout my data analysis chapters (Three to Five), much of the data is based on the observations of industry insiders. However, although this means that the data sample is somewhat incomplete, the level of access granted to myself as a researcher—and the perspective presented throughout this thesis as a result—is richer for it, as such a wealth of insider knowledge could only have been revealed by another insider such as myself. Further, I argue that such a data sample is still representative of the majority of attendees at small live music venues, as these spaces tend to attract ‘insiders’ and other more engaged participants due to their nature as niche spaces of cultural production and social hubs for local music scenes, many of which require a
certain degree of social and cultural capital to access comfortably in the first place.

As part of my research, I attended each venue regularly, observing and documenting the musical performances and social activities via photographs—of the musicians performing, other participants, venue workers, and the venue space itself—and note-taking. These fieldwork visits primarily encompassed special events, such as The Old Bar’s week-long ‘Decade of Dickhead’ ten-year anniversary celebrations, along with other significant occasions such as mid-week showcases or album launches. These amounted to over a dozen fieldwork site visits across my two case study venues. Following each of these visits I wrote a personal reflection based on my fieldnotes and photographs, documenting who was there, which bands performed, how many people attended, how participants interacted with the space, and other significant thoughts. Further, I frequented both venues as a casual participant countless times over the course of my candidature, often performing as a musician, previously working as a bartender, as well as attending as a patron. I would approximate these casual visits to once a week over the five years of my doctoral studies. My approach to fieldwork reflects both traditional and modern approaches to ethnomusicology (Barz and Cooley 2008; Fargion 2009; Salganik and Heckathorn 2004), as well as foundational ethnographic research on popular music scenes (Cohen 1991; Finnegan 1989; Kruse 2003). The information collected creates a snapshot of how The Old Bar and The Tote function as social hubs, how the interactions that occur in these venues contribute to local music scenes, and the contribution these spaces make to the Melbourne live music ecology.

The vast majority of my interview participants were inner-urban, white and middle-class, although many also come from ostensibly working class
backgrounds. The result of this is a very Anglo-centric pool of respondents. Diversity has been maintained in terms of gender (18 men and 16 women), but most research participants belong to the same ethnic and socio-economic demographic of white, service, hospitality, and creative industry workers. Such a demographic is characteristic of the small venues of Melbourne’s inner-north and its local music scene, as discussed further in following section.

Limitations

Viewing small venues as social hubs implies notions of both inclusion and exclusion. Participants that are more entrenched in these venues reap the benefits of participation, as the scene tends to favour those with a distinct habitus. Although this is problematic, it is not to say that these venues aren’t tolerant, inclusive spaces, but more so that a niche sense of habitus facilitates access more readily to those that are entrenched in the scene and its social field/space (Butler 1999).

The Old Bar and The Tote have fairly distinct political positions. Their booking policies reflect current debates around identity politics, particularly those that centre on feminism and LGBTQI+ inclusion, which is generally accepted and encouraged as a norm across the small venues of Melbourne’s inner-north. Occasional queer-friendly nights have been hosted at my case study venues (such as Truck Stop Cock\(^2\)), or associated venues (such as Potato Cake\(^3\) at The Public Bar\(^4\)), along with trans-friendly nights at The

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\(^2\) Truck Stop Cock was a semi-regular queer-friendly live music and DJ event previously hosted at The Old Bar by Adam Curley.

\(^3\) Potato Cake was a regular queer-friendly live music and DJ event previously hosted at The Public Bar by Lara Soulio.

\(^4\) The Public Bar was a small live music venue in North Melbourne previously owned and operated by the owners of The Old Bar.
Tote. However, these aren’t explicitly queer spaces and queer-friendly nights are infrequent and temporary. Further, these spaces remain majority white in terms of their staff, patrons, and the musicians that perform therein, which sits in contrast to the neighbourhoods in which they are set; increasingly gentrifying yet traditionally diverse inner-urban suburbs housing a multiplicity of demographics.

Across my two case study venues, standards of behaviour are maintained as female- and queer-friendly. These are established through various means from the booking of queer musicians to visual signage that reinforce messages of safety, and reminds patrons that any bad behaviour will result in ejection from the venue and a possible ban. Women are generally well-represented behind the bar as bartenders and shift managers, and in the audience as concert-goers. The Old Bar has a strong history of hiring female staff and The Tote have regularly been booking female musicians since becoming a dedicated live music venue in the 1980s, encouraging many of the gender-diverse Melbourne bands of the last 30 years. However, women remain largely underrepresented on stage. The Tote has only recently shaken its image as a masculine space due to its ‘rockist’ working-class roughness and dive-bar characteristics (van den Dungen 2011; Walker 2012). In addition to this the ‘executive-class’ of venue owners and managers are all men, and although they make concerted efforts to make their venues female-friendly, they are still largely coded as masculine spaces.

New parents, children, and the elderly are also broadly excluded, mainly due to factors like volume, late opening hours, and alcohol licensing.

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5 “Rockism… is treating rock as normative. In the rockist view, rock is the standard state of popular music: the kind to which everything else is compared, explicitly or implicitly” (Wolk 2006). Rockism is also often equated with working-class masculinities (Frere-Jones 2003; Sanneh 2004; Wolk 2006), particularly in an Australian context. The term was coined by Pete Wylie, a musician who organised the wittily titled ‘Race against Rockism’ campaign in 1981 to mock rock purists (Morley 2006).
laws. These are not factors that are strictly limiting, but present problems in terms of lifestyle. For example, parents are unable to bring their children to the majority of live music events as the nature of these spaces dictate loud volumes and late performance times, even on weeknights. However, The Old Bar often hosts child-friendly performances on Saturday and Sunday afternoons, with an emphasis on quieter volumes and child-appropriate acts.

It is a generalisation that the elderly are completely absent, but this is largely true of my interview data. Further, physically disabled and wheelchair-bound patrons have severely limited access to these spaces. Most small venues lack adequate wheelchair facilities, as they are spaces adapted from previous uses. This raises questions of what kinds of bodies are able to access these spaces (e.g. young, energetic, able-bodied etc.).

Historically, both The Old Bar and The Tote are aligned with white, working-class identities. This is in terms of their vernacular culture, the aesthetics of the venue spaces themselves, the music performed therein, and the narrative of Australian pub-rock more broadly. Although not strictly coded as working class, the discourse of Australian pub-rock and its small venues seems to emphasise a working-class vernacular regardless of socio-economic background. This can be observed in the informality and occasional vulgarity of language used within these spaces. Middle-class identities align the venues with the kind of art-school leanings of Melbourne rock more broadly, particularly the narrative of post-punk bands of the 1980s such as The Birthday Party, Dirty Three, and other Nick Cave-associated acts. However, it is the vernacular of the urban working-class that is heard and observed in these spaces, particularly The Tote. This aligns with Collingwood’s sense of ‘place’, a historically working-class suburb that has been slower to gentrify than neighbouring Fitzroy.
Finally, people of colour are largely absent from these spaces. My case study venues are coded as white, reflecting rockist taste and the rock canon of Western popular music more broadly. The lack of people of colour in these spaces could easily be attributed to disinterest, but it would be reductive to assume that potential participants from diverse ethnic backgrounds are uninterested in the music scenes inherent in these small rooms purely based on their aesthetics. Therefore, a deeper investigation needs to made into the racial coding of these spaces, as included in my ‘Recommendations for future research’.

Analysis

The vast majority of my interview respondents are identified by name (see Table 1), as I believe that their roles as music industry workers and live music enthusiasts performing a wide variety of roles and skills can be discussed in more detail if they are presented to readers as identifiable individuals. Further, there is little ethical risk to identifying respondents in this context, as publishing this data should not compromise them. I also obtained the appropriate ethical clearance from my institution to leave respondents identified unless they specifically objected (see Appendix B). Finally, I thought it was important to demonstrate the humanity of my respondents, as my initial connection to most of them was a personal one, emphasising the informal and social nature of the local music scene of Melbourne’s inner-north.

Upon completing my fieldwork interviews, I compiled all of my interview transcriptions into a master document, ordering the responses in terms of theme and the role (or roles) of each interviewee (e.g. booking agent, bar staff, musician etc.). The themes I used to categorise interview
responses took shape throughout the analysis process and are reflected in my data analysis chapters. Broadly, these were: ‘place’; ‘space’; and ‘the participants’ themselves.

Interview responses describing Melbourne, its inner-northern suburbs of Fitzroy and Collingwood, the broader socio-cultural history of these areas, my case study venues, and the generic idea of ‘the local pub’ were ordered in terms of ‘place’ (Chapter Three). Discussions of the venue spaces themselves, their aesthetic, materiality, and the intra-venue spaces of ‘the front bar’ and ‘the band room’ are discussed in terms of the ‘live music ecology’ (Chapter Four). Finally, the participants themselves, the bar staff, door staff, sound engineers, venue owners, musicians, and live music enthusiasts, have been framed in terms of the ‘scene’ and its participants; ‘social actors’, those individuals who exercise agency as opposed to constraining social structures (van Leeuwen 1996), that make up the local music scene of Melbourne’s inner-north (Chapter Five).

**Contribution to the Field**

This thesis offers an important contribution to the existing literature on live music ecologies, music scenes, and the role of small venues as social hubs for local music scenes, sitting at the crossroads of sociology, cultural studies, and popular music studies. Previous research on venues and music scenes, such as Sara Cohen’s research on Liverpool (Cohen 2013; 2007), Barry Shank’s work in Austin (Shank 1994) and Ben Gallan’s writings on Wollongong (Gallan and Gibson 2013; Gallan 2012) have taken an ethnographic approach, considering issues of urban regeneration, place making and vernacular cultural histories, with an emphasis on ‘the local’. Building on these immersive insider ethnographies, my research takes a similar approach
with an emphasis on the materiality of the venue spaces themselves, as well as the exchanges and conversions of capital that take place within them. This thesis is therefore aligned with both historical accounts of place-based live music scenes and more recent writings on Bourdieusian forms of capital as they occur in music scenes.

This thesis specifically documents the benefits of participation in local music scenes as they apply to both individuals, the local music scene, and the role that small venues play in fostering this participation, as well as their value as the grassroots foundation of a wider live music ecology. This aspect of live music participation has previously been identified as one of its most beneficial (Bennett 1997; Frith 2002; Rogers 2008; Gallan and Gibson 2013), yet despite this, the economic contribution of the Australian live music sector has dominated the focus of most substantial reports (Deloitte Access Economics 2011; Ernst and Young 2011). This is largely due to the difficulty of measuring social and cultural value, as opposed to more easily quantifiable factors such as financial impact and economic capital. Previous Australian research on local music scenes and live music ecologies is also limited, often focusing on a specific venue or scene without a view to each venue’s impact on cultural dynamics, their value for musicians and other participants, local music histories, or the role of venues as social hubs.

My contribution to the literature is the use of Pierre Bourdieu’s theoretical framework to investigate, analyse, and explain the previously unexplored connections between local music scenes and the live music ecology. Bourdieu’s theories of cultural, social, and symbolic capital allow us to value niche spaces of cultural production, such as small live music venues, in non-economic terms. They facilitate an understanding of how these venues convert their social and cultural capital into economic capital, by
drawing on a ‘currency of cool’— cultural capital—and a network of participants—social capital—to build a community of practice that could otherwise be defined as a music scene.

**Thesis Structure**

This thesis is presented in six chapters, structured as follows. This introduction (Chapter One) outlines the aims and significance of my research, along with my research methods and data collection techniques. As my methodology hinges on an ethnography of music venues and the local music scene of Melbourne’s inner-north, a brief discussion of previous studies relevant to my field is included, along with an overview of my research design and methods, data collection techniques, approach to data analysis, the limitations of my research, and a summary of my contribution to the field.

The current literature on ‘music scenes’ is discussed in Chapter Two (Key Concepts and Literature Review), along with a definition of the ‘live music ecology’ and a further comparison to ‘scene’ as a concept. Here I posit that both are useful descriptors of musical practice that complement each other, with scene encompassing the everyday social practices that make up engagement with music, and live music ecology deployed as a term for the institutions, organisations, events, and venue spaces that form the materiality of music scenes, as well as the disparate social actors that impact the scene’s sustainability without necessarily participating in the scene themselves. These key concepts are couched in the Bourdieusian theories of social and cultural capital, which are also defined and discussed in Chapter Two. This chapter is broken into five topic areas: (1) previous research on my case study venues, small live music venues in general, and definitions of live music and popular music as they relate to the setting of small venues; (2) Bourdieusian notions
Chapter 1 - Introduction

of cultural, social, subcultural, and symbolic capital, and the differences between these, along with the concepts of habitus and field; (3) current writing on music scenes, subcultures, the live music ecology, and their relevance to this research; (4) ‘place’, ‘space’, and ‘everyday’ life as they relate to music’s production and consumption; and (5) ‘creative cities’-led cultural policy, gentrification, and the effect these have had on Melbourne’s night-time economy.

My analysis chapters (Three, Four, and Five) are broken down into three distinct areas of investigation. My data analysis begins with a chapter on ‘place’ (Chapter Three), centering on the inner-northern Melbourne suburbs of Fitzroy and Collingwood that house my two case study venues, and concluding with a discussion of ‘the local pub’ as it is situated in the Australian context. Chapter Four analyses the ‘live music ecology’ through case studies of the actual venue spaces themselves. The influence of the visual aesthetics and spatiality of each venue space on participant perceptions is discussed, as are the front bar and band rooms of each venue and the distinctions between these intra-venue spaces. Through an analysis of the social dynamics of the front bar and band rooms, I discuss notions of familiarity and comfort as told through the experiences of regular participants and patrons. This includes a discussion of those that have considerable agency in each space. For example, a venue’s booking agent acts as a cultural gatekeeper, determining which bands are able to perform in the venue and the level of influence this has over the local scene. The venue booking agent therefore functions as a tastemaker of sorts, overseeing the musical aesthetic of the space, which has repercussions for the social space of the venue and the status of the venue in the live music ecology. Finally, throughout Chapter Five I discuss how live music scenes are articulated in
and between the interactions of scene participants, focussing on the role that various forms of capital play in local music scenes and the different participants that generate and mobilise this capital.

Chapter Five breaks the social and professional roles of scene participants down into categories in order to analyse how these participants influence the social space of the local music scene. I examine the role of regular patrons and live music enthusiasts in this chapter, using their experiences to explore a culture of participation evident in these spaces, as well as the roles of security, door and bar staff in facilitating said culture. Musicians populate both the stage and the crowd, and contribute to local music scenes on an essential level. They represent both the cultural aesthetic of the venue and a distinct subsection of its constituent attendees. To demonstrate the role of small live music venues as social hubs and performance sites for musicians, Chapter Five includes two short case studies on local groups Gold Class and Camp Cope, two bands that began their careers in the small rooms of Melbourne’s inner-north. Finally, the thesis concludes with a discussion of the primary themes presented in my data analysis chapters, along with an overview of my key findings (Chapter Six). The many practical attributes of this project are demonstrated throughout the following chapters, as its methodology relies on applied research practices and its potential outcomes are of relevance to the management, operation and value of small live music venues generally, as well as live music and cultural policy more broadly.
Chapter 2 – Key Concepts and Literature Review

This chapter discusses and defines the key concepts and theories integral to this thesis and provides an overview of the literature surrounding each, outlining the conceptual apparatus of this work. Drawing on the literature, this chapter defines each concept in relation to previous definitions and my own research. These include: literature on my case study venues, small venues, live music, and popular music in general; Bourdieusian notions of capital (cultural, social, subcultural, symbolic etc.) and other concepts stemming from Bourdieu’s work such as habitus and field; music scenes and the ‘live music ecology’; and notions of place, space, and ‘the everyday’. Also included is a brief discussion of gentrification and the night-time economy. Drawing on the literature I define these terms as they relate to my thesis topic and research question, setting each up for further discussion in my analysis chapters.

The Old Bar and The Tote

Research on my two case studies is primarily limited to secondary sources such as newspaper articles and other popular media (Boland 2010; Cook and Wilkinson 2018; Donovan 2010a-2010h; Donovan and Roberts 2010; Dowling 2012; Hawthorne 2010; Mathieson 2012; Mihelakos 2011a-2011c; Mihelakos and Roberts 2010; Murfett 2010; Roberts 2010; Shaw 2010a, 2010b; van den Dungen 2011; Yarra City Arts 2015). In addition to this, a number of Melbourne scholars have included The Tote in their research,
focussing on gentrification’s effects on Melbourne’s inner-north and the role that music scenes contribute to the city’s cultural vibrancy (Homan 2014, 2011a, 2011b, 2010; Shaw 2013, 2009, 2005). Many of these publications centre on The Tote’s closing, the liquor licensing laws that caused this closure, and the subsequent protests, such as the Save Live Australia’s Music (SLAM) campaign and the policy reforms that followed (Eltham and Westbury 2010; Homan 2016; Martin 2017; Taylor, Arrowsmith and Cook 2014; Wilkinson 2011; Zajdow 2013), discussed further in Chapter 3. Finally, Rosemary Overell’s ethnographic work on Melbourne’s grindcore scene also mentions The Tote in the context of her fieldwork (2014, 2010).

Publications on The Old Bar are far fewer than those on The Tote, although a previous thesis on tipping culture in Melbourne and New York used The Old Bar as a case study (Burgess 2013), albeit deidentified. Also, Felicity Cull’s book chapter ‘Dead music in live music culture’ (2015) briefly makes reference to The Old Bar in a fieldwork anecdote. Finally, I have published a number of papers over the course of my candidature that draw on my doctoral research on The Old Bar (Strong and Whiting 2018; Whiting 2015).

Small Live Music Venues

Live music venues have been previously described as small-to-medium businesses, contributors to a creative or ‘night-time’ economy (Florida 2010, 2006, 2002; Lovatt and O’Connor 1995), heritage sites (Bennett and Rogers 2016a, 2016b), and places of employment. Australian research on live music venues has been framed primarily in a financial context (Deloitte Access Economics 2011; Ernst and Young 2011), or as a reaction against cultural policy (Flew 2008; Homan 2011a, 2008; Johnson and Homan 2003),
licensing regulations (Burke and Schmidt 2013) or gentrification (Shaw 2013, 2009). However, several qualitative ethnographic studies have emerged in recent years (Bennett and Rogers 2016b; Driver and Bennett 2015; Gallan and Gibson 2013; Gallan 2012; Gibson and Homan 2004; Rogers 2008; Smyly 2010; Threadgold 2015; Whiting and Carter 2016; Whiting 2015) with a renewed focus on the social and cultural value of music venues.

As I define them, small venues have a capacity of 500 patrons or less and fit two types of categorisation: licensed premises; and unofficial, unlicensed venues. Licensed venues include such spaces as local pubs, clubs, small bars, dedicated performance venues, multi-use spaces, and any venue with a capacity of 500 patrons or less that holds a valid liquor license. Unofficial, unlicensed venues are usually private or privately leased spaces that do not hold a liquor license. This type of venue might include local halls, garages, shop-fronts, dwellings, galleries, warehouses, converted rehearsal spaces, or private residences etc. Unofficial, unlicensed venues often emerge in response to specific circumstances, such as a perceived gap in the types of venues already provided by the official night-time economy or a desire amongst a community of music fans for a different kind of experience (Bennett and Rogers 2016b, p. 492). Although unofficial, unlicensed music venues are included in my definition of small live music venues, for the purposes of this thesis I have focussed on two licensed venues, The Tote and the Old Bar.

Live Music
My definition of ‘live music’ encompasses popular music performance practices. ‘Live music’ differs from other forms of music creation, such as “music production” (Bennett and Rogers 2016a, p. 118), in that it relates
specifically to those musical activities that are performed in a venue or public space to a live audience. Further, ‘live music’ as a descriptor is now usually reserved for those experiences where the audience is in physical proximity to the performance itself (Shuker 2012, p. 201). In contrast, “music production” relates to both creation and performance. Although music production is an important component of any music scene, whether local, translocal or global, I am specifically interested in the live performance of music in a delineated space; the live venue. This delineation emphasises space and place, a key focus of this thesis.

There are multiple ways in which we can discuss and define the live music experience as it occurs within the setting of small live music venues. The three definitions that I adopt throughout this thesis are as follows. First, live music as ‘performance’ delineates the experience in terms of a discrete time and space. The implications of time, space, and place are relevant here, as the temporal, spatial, and locational aspects of live music have further implications for notions of scene and its inherent transience. In this context, venues act as sites for musical performances that are experienced by audiences and musicians in the limited bounds of time and space.

Second, live music as a product that has economic value, whether as a dollar-figure or as a representation of the cultural value attached to it (i.e. cultural capital) (Throsby 1999). This value may be made up of other forms of capital, such as social and symbolic capital, and has specific benefits for scene participants. These benefits can be commercial, civic, or individual in nature, and may include income, employment, volunteering opportunities, well-being, and satisfaction (Carter 2015, p. 39). In this context, live music venues are businesses that profit by packaging musical performances as
entertainment for patrons, facilitating the sale of additional goods such as food and drink.

Third, the live music experience can be viewed in terms of social capital and its generation, as an interaction between performers, audience members and one another, all of whom fulfil certain roles and whose actions influence the live music experience as a whole, adding to its cultural value. Small venues are meeting spaces for scene participants: local points of mutual interest in a specific area that inherently limits the number of participants to those that live nearby and participate regularly. This definition leads to an understanding of live music as it occurs in a specific time, space, and place; as a scene-building event wherein small venues are fundamental to a sustainable live music ecology. This is the core of my thesis. All three of the above definitions are useful within the context of this project and I utilise a combination of each throughout.

**Popular Music**

Popular music has long been defined in terms of a perceived cultural hierarchy and is historically determined in said hierarchy as being beneath ‘high’ culture (i.e. art music). However, scholars (Brabazon 2012; Middleton 1990; Middleton and Manuel 2010; Regev 2013; Shuker 2012, 2001) have considerably undermined this distinction in recent years, turning their attention towards the way in which audiences engage with and define their experiences of popular music (Brabazon 2012, p. 2). In addition to these definitions, I define popular music not only in terms of its audience, but also regarding the spaces in which it is performed. These spaces are familiar and welcoming for those that regularly attend them, and are also broadly lacking in a sense of formality. They are not only performance spaces but meeting
places, built for socialisation, celebration and the forming of identities, both individual and collective. Popular music, in this sense, is not chamber, theatre or concert music, nor is it the sound art of contemporary galleries. It is the musical practices that take place in more informal, casual and ordinary settings, such as the local pub, club, or bar.

The Spectre of Bourdieu

An overview of Bourdieu, his theoretical framework, and the various critiques of and updates to this framework are foregrounded in this literature review. This includes a discussion of how Bourdieu’s theory of cultural production is still relevant to fields that are aligned with a heterogeneous understanding of identity, such as place-based local music scenes. Despite recent criticisms to the contrary, I argue that Bourdieu’s conceptual apparatus is not mutually exclusive of later, post-Bourdieuian theories of cultural consumption (Hennion 2015; Wright 2015).

One significant point of tension regarding Bourdieu is the apparent rigidity of his conceptual apparatus, deemed too structuralist in nature to account for the nuances of modern cultural consumption. Indeed, “[t]hose who profess some sympathy for Bourdieu’s concepts have often pointed to significant shortcomings in his work, finding it overly rigid or lacking a convincing account of technology and creative agency” (Prior 2013, p. 185). Popular music scholars have criticised Bourdieu’s structuralism as unable to adequately account for everyday consumption of music (DeNora 2000; Hennion 2007), stating that it “[n]eglects the ways our lives are intimately entwined with music, including how it surprises us or modulates our tastes and emotions” (Prior 2013, p. 182). Rather than believing taste to be the result of status, class, education, and upbringing, scholars such as Antoine
Hennion (2015) assert that taste is “a self-reflexive process of engaging with the sensorial world” (as cited in Highmore 2016, p. 163). Both Hennion and Wright (2015) offer a return to a phenomenological understanding of taste, rejecting notions of habitus and the field—with their predispositions and “classified classifiers” (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 6), and emphasising the empirical and personal world of the senses, along with that of feeling and affect (Highmore 2016, p. 161).

Although these criticisms of Bourdieu are justified and such work is accurate in its critique, I argue that such an understanding of taste is not mutually exclusive of Bourdieu and his assertion that engagement with culture is an inherently classed and classified act. Theories of non-economic capital, field and habitus are still useful when analysing placed-based live music scenes and the live music ecology. In a similar vein to sociologists such as Steven Threadgold (2015) and David Hesmondhalgh (2006), I believe we can find an intersection between Bourdieu and poststructuralism wherein the affective, unquantifiable power of music is acknowledged while also observing how social agents mobilise cultural and social capital to gain economic and symbolic capital. Therefore, we can still draw much from Bourdieu’s understanding of how certain intangible forms of value—social, cultural, and symbolic capital—are integral to the functioning of marginal spaces of cultural production and taste cultures such as live music venues and place-based live music scenes. Hence, an overview of the literature on music scenes, subcultures, and the ‘live music ecology’ is also necessary, as covered later in this chapter. However, first I must outline and define the key concepts of cultural, social and—to a lesser degree—subcultural capital relevant to this research project.
Cultural, social and subcultural capital

This section presents my conceptual framework through a critique and revision of Bourdieu’s writings on cultural and social capital, field and habitus. This is complemented by subsequent work by popular music and cultural studies scholars on the more recent theory of subcultural capital. Rather than focussing on how processes of distinction delineate class and other social categories—a facet of Bourdieu’s work that has been heavily criticised—I am more interested in how cultural and social capital are converted into economic forms in niche spaces of cultural production, such as small live music venues. Therefore, the emphasis here is on the production of culture rather than its consumption.

Social and cultural capital are the most influential forms of capital in local music scenes, determining the way they operate and which members of the scene retain the most control and status. In their most potent form they can be converted into economic capital and are also used to bestow upon individuals and organisations symbolic capital. This question of conversion is central to Bourdieu’s concept of capital, as “capital is only capital to the extent that it can be converted into other types of capital” (Jensen 2006, p. 268). Any understanding of capital as a value form, whether it be cultural, social, or subcultural, hinges on its potential for exchange. Bourdieu’s capital is therefore theoretically only of value to the degree it can be converted into economic currency. However, before we move on to a discussion of how such conversions take place, I must first define these forms of capital.

Cultural capital

The concept of cultural capital was first defined by Bourdieu (1984) and expanded to include ‘cultural competences’, which can be embodied
(internalized and intangible), objectified (cultural products), and institutionalized (officially accredited)” (Bourdieu 1997, as cited in Edgerton and Roberts 2014, p. 195). A key assertion of this is that personal taste is not the result of an individual’s immanent nature, but of family background, education and class; “[t]aste classifies, and it classifies the classifier. Social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make… in which their position in the objective classifications is expressed or betrayed” (Bourdieu 1984, p. 6).

Cultural capital refers to the way status may be conferred via the accumulation of knowledge through upbringing and education. This is because “to the socially recognised hierarchy of the arts… corresponds a social hierarchy of the consumers. This predisposes tastes to function as markers of ‘class’” (Bourdieu 1984, pp. 1-2). Knowledge of an artistic movement, a musical group, or a particular album is an indicator of a person’s distinct cultural belonging and taste: their cultural capital, and therefore their social status.

A person’s cultural capital is defined by their tastes, interests, and how these indicate their status in social hierarchies. For instance “in Britain, accent has long been a key indicator of cultural capital, and university degrees have long been cultural capital in institutionalised form” (Thornton 1996, p. 10). Objectified cultural capital takes the form of cultural products, such as records and other musical artefacts. In record-collecting circles, the more obscure and hard-to-find a particular recording is, the more cultural capital accrues to it (Connell and Gibson 2003, p. 107). If certain objects (such as records) hold an identifiable cultural value (i.e. capital), which is convertible into status and credibility, then “art and cultural consumption are
predisposed, consciously and deliberately or not, to fulfil a social function of legitimating social differences” (Bourdieu 1984, p. 7)

Those not ‘in the know’ lack the means to grasp the value of a specific work of art, as such value is often articulated only in relation to the history of a specific artistic tradition (Bourdieu 1984, p. 4). Further, cultural capital can be embodied as part of the habitus, which Bourdieu defines as “the learned set of preferences or dispositions by which a person orients to the social world” (2002, in Edgerton and Roberts 2014, p. 195), discussed further in proceeding sections. Therefore, the social agent has a bodily and pre-reflexive sense of what is appropriate in a given context (Bourdieu 1986, in Jensen 2006, p. 260). For Bourdieu, this embodied cultural capital is the most significant (Throsby 1999, p. 4), as “most of the properties of cultural capital can be deduced from the fact that, in its fundamental state, it is linked to the body and presupposes embodiment” (Bourdieu 1986, p. 244). To define cultural capital, it is important that we also define ‘field’, a term that is used by Bourdieu and others as a way of framing the context in which cultural capital is generated, valued, and exchanged.

Field

Much of my research invokes the Bourdieusian notion of ‘field’ to describe areas of cultural production, such as music scenes, venues, and the broader live music ecology. A field is a “space of objective relations between positions defined by their rank in the distribution of competing powers or species of capital” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p. 113). Fields are social and cultural spaces, and are organised around identifiable modes of interaction and practice, such as the classroom, the sporting field, or the live music venue (Edgerton and Roberts 2014, p. 195). All fields are subject to
underlying objective relations that structure social relationships (Bottero and Crossley 2011, p. 100), which are most clearly defined in terms of capital (social, cultural, economic etc.). Capital is therefore “both the process within, and product, of a field” (Thompson 2008, p. 69). The local music scene of Melbourne’s inner-north is a specific ‘field’ that encompasses my case study venues and those participants engaging it. The position of these social actors—or ‘scene participants’—in the scene is derived from the interrelation of their habitus and the capital they can mobilise in this field (Edgerton and Roberts 2014, p. 195). Local music scenes can therefore be best understood as fields that are specific to the consumption and production of live music.

Previous popular music research that draws on Bourdieu has focussed on fields of cultural production where economic capital is relatively scarce, such as local music scenes. This scarcity of economic capital results in an emphasis and reliance on social capital, cultural capital and the commodification of a distinct set of knowledges that can be drawn upon to ‘convert’ these into economic capital. As Bourdieu states, “[t]he structure of the field, i.e., the unequal distribution of capital, is the source of the specific effects of capital, i.e., the appropriation of profits and the power to impose the laws of functioning of the field most favourable to capital and its reproduction” (1986, p. 49). Cultural and social capital are therefore arguably more valuable in local music scenes. Research on these forms of capital in popular music-related fields includes work by Steve Threadgold (2015), Threadgold and Nilan (2009), David Hesmondhalgh (2006), and Sarah Thornton (1996). Further literature on popular music and alternative forms of capital also includes critiques of Bourdieu by cultural industries scholars (Prior 2013; Hesmondhalgh 2006), as well as several critiques of Thornton’s
subsequent theory of subcultural capital (Jensen 2006; Moore 2005), as discussed later in this chapter.

**Habitus**

Habitus is a broad term that encompasses the dispositions and experiences that make up an individuals’ understanding of the world and their place in it. Put simply, habitus is defined as that which generates the horizons of personal expectations that guide what feels ‘natural’ to some and alienating to others (Kahn-Harris 2007, pp. 70-73); the “schemata or structures of perception, conception and action” (Bourdieu 2002, p. 27). As “[h]abitus is rooted in family upbringing (socialisation within the family) and conditioned by one’s position in the social structure” (Edgerton and Roberts 2014, p. 195) it is therefore subconscious and entrenched, and operates on a level beyond self-control and personal agency (Bourdieu 1984, p. 466). It is so deeply ingrained in an individual that it is difficult to unpack, as it is often made up of a complex web of interrelated factors and characteristics.

Habitus is inherently tied to notions of cultural, social, and symbolic capital, and is influenced and shaped by a large swathe of factors, articulated in multiple, multifaceted ways (Bourdieu 1984, pp. 470-471). Habitus also serves to reproduce and re-inscribe in individuals the divisions that already occur across class, gender, ethnicities, and society. This impacts the ability individuals have to generate, mobilise and convert capital. However, some elements of the habitus can be altered and adapted, particularly through the accumulation of alternative forms of capital. Habitus is also significant in discussions of ‘social space’.

**Social Space**
‘Social space’ is a way of discussing ‘field’ and ‘habitus’ that also accounts for spatiality and the movement of social actors through space. In this context, “habitus is a position within social space… It is part of everyday, common-sense understandings of one’s social world and how to behave within it… The orientations and dispositions of the habitus take on differing amounts of value within social space” (Reed-Danahay 2015, p. 81). This value is shaped and illustrated in terms of capital, which takes on various forms—cultural, social, and symbolic—and can be accumulated, mobilised or converted depending on the context i.e. the field, or ‘social space’. Here social space is used as a way of framing the field in terms of spatiality, as “the term field is most often used to describe forms of social action or interaction in which geographical space is less important than social action” (Reed-Danahay 2015, p. 70).

**Habitus, the ‘Scene’, and Embodied Cultural Capital**

An understanding of the embodiment of cultural capital is integral to any discussion of Bourdieu. The way that it plays into the performance of identity is where Bourdieu and prominent gender studies theorist Judith Butler (1999) agree, as both view the body as culturally constructed and reproduced through the notion of ‘practice’. Therefore, like gender, embodied cultural capital can be viewed as another type of cultural construction, ascribed to the body through the performance of taste. However, for Bourdieu, it is through the habitus that tastes are ritually installed and memorized in the body, manifesting themselves as physical dispositions; the bodily ‘hexis’ (Prior 2013).

Participation in local music scenes results in the formation of the scenes themselves, as the habitus of scene participants constructs the field of
the scene as they encounter it. Participants are the scene, in that the collective interaction of their habitus forms the field and its social space. This aligns with Butler’s interpretation of field and habitus as performative and mutually co-constituted (Butler 1999, p. 119). In positioning the subject—their habitus and body—as formative in the construction of the field, Butler reaffirms an understanding of music scenes as fields in the Bourdieusian sense while simultaneously suggesting that such fields are the product of an ongoing exchange of capital and the constant interaction of various co-constituted habitus through participation and engagement; “the habitus is formed, but it is also formative… Strictly speaking, the habitus produces or generates dispositions as well as their transposability” (Butler 1999, p. 116).

By subjecting participants to the demands of live music scenes, the participants’ habitus constructs the field of the scene by adapting to the impositions of that field that are simultaneously constituted in the dispositions of the habitus that it engages with. Local music scenes are therefore the mutual co-creation of field and habitus in a delimited social space. However, such interactions sometimes result in a lack of congruence between the habitus of a potential scene participant and the field of a particular venue. Not all can ‘incline’ or adapt.

In regards to my own sense of habitus and history of experience in Melbourne’s live music scene, cultural and social capital worked in tandem, as my engagement with the Melbourne music scene was informed by my cultural awareness at the time. This was aided by my immersion in the field as a staff member of The Old Bar, allowing me to assert myself in the scene through the mobilisation of cultural and social capital. An intertwining of social and cultural capital is common in niche fields of cultural production (Throsby 1995, p. 5; Zweigenhaft 1993), such as local music scenes. Further,
participation in music scenes takes multiple forms and can be articulated in nonverbal and embodied ways (Driver and Bennett 2015). The tacit embodied knowledge demonstrated in knowing how and when to dance or ‘mosh’ to a song is itself a kind of cultural capital, reaffirming and building on a participants’ habitus. Different types of dancing suit different types of music and this embodied knowledge is gained only through engagement and participation. However, there are many other forms of cultural capital other than the embodied that are taken for granted and largely invisible in the fields in which they are valued. This is what makes measuring them such a challenge.

**Demonstrating Cultural Capital**

It is important to determine cultural capital more so in the distinctions it marks out than the status it bestows, as this status is subjective and often only meaningful in the fields to which it is born. In this context, taste is used “to establish and mark differences by a process of distinction which is not (or not necessarily) a distinct knowledge” (Bourdieu 1984, p. 466). Therefore, taste cultures often lack reflexivity and in many cases a reflexive approach would harm the illusion of an innate sense of taste. The booking agent of a live music venue must know the scene intrinsically or they would potentially lose the perceived authority that they hold; “[t]he crucial factor is that knowledge about music and style cannot appear to have been acquired through the mainstream media or other outlets of the culture industry” (Moore 2005, pp. 232-233). This knowledge could therefore be conceptualised as ‘subcultural capital’ (defined later in this chapter) rather than cultural capital due to the specificity of its application and the field in which it is mobilised. However, I find such a
distinction unhelpful, as Bourdieu’s definition of cultural capital (1984) works just as well. For example:

Bourdieu (1984) theorized that cultural capital must appear to be innate or mysteriously acquired… In the case of hipness, people lose status if they seem to be trying too hard to keep up with the trends; their hipness must come “naturally”. (Moore 2005, p. 233)

Here we can see that cultural capital has been used to describe similar processes of acquiring ‘hipness’ as that of subcultural capital, the only difference being the field to which these terms are applied. I contend that cultural capital is adequate as a descriptor of taste and distinction in the music scene of Melbourne’s inner-north—my field of enquiry, especially considering my case studies are small businesses that trade on their cultural and social capital, rather than niche underground subcultures.

Taste cultures are knowledge cultures, as one must be familiar with the various codes and signs that are particular to each field. Such understandings of the articulation of power in the fields of cultural production proposed by Bourdieu are relatively transferable to modern music-making activities.⁶ In cultural studies generally and popular music studies specifically Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital is often deployed in reference to highly valued knowledge, symbols, associations, and tastes of a cultural field (Threadgold 2015, p. 53). Cultural capital is useful in demonstrating that symbolic knowledge and taste not only imbue a music scene with meaning, such as in the case of aesthetic and musical markers (e.g. fashion, instrumentation, genre etc.), but are also representative of status. However, “cultural capital is a concept that is meant

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⁶ Although Distinction (1984) was written as a critique of the French upper-class, Bourdieu’s theories are applicable to local music scenes and the cultures of engagement that surround them. Hence, they have been adapted and applied to various taste cultures and music scenes, such as those explored in Sarah Thornton’s Club Cultures (1996) and other work here in Australia by Steve Threadgold (2015) and Pam Nilan (Threadgold and Nilan 2009).
to help understand not just how a field works, but how fields are hierarchical and how some fields are more important than others” (Threadgold 2015, p. 53).

Like most spaces that hinge on social interactions and exchanges of ‘insider’ knowledge, music scenes and the live music venues that house them are semi-hierarchical spaces wherein the lines between cultural capital and other harder forms of capital are often blurred. Pecking orders emerge within these spaces, based on the individual cultural and social capital of bands, booking agents, and other scene participants. Further, venues embody history and tradition, and provide social hubs for music scenes, suggesting that the concept of ‘culture’ carries with it a notion of ‘value’ (Throsby 1999, p. 6), and that some venues might therefore be more valuable than others. However, not everyone can convert soft, social and cultural capital to harder, economic capital, as “the ability to transform subcultural to cultural and then economic capital requires tactics and negotiations that need reflexivity” (Threadgold 2015, p. 53). Only those with a considerable amount of status in the scene can leverage such status into economic advantages. Venue booking agents are a good example of this (Gallan 2012). Like booking agents, independent label owners, music publicists, and rock journalists are other examples of professional and semi-professional music industry careers. Their conversion of social and cultural capital is an essential part of their professional activities, effectively transforming these into a career (Threadgold 2015, p. 54). Such niche professional pathways hinge on the ability to convert key contacts and knowledge of the scene into a viable occupation. Contacts, networks, and the social skills needed to capitalise on such networks can also be understood in terms of ‘social capital’.
Social capital

A city’s live music scene is articulated through social interaction and participation in music-making activities. Live music is a communal event that draws people together to share in an experience. It encourages like-minded individuals to gather and “provides a sense of community that is not present when listening to music alone” (Black, Fox and Kochanowski 2007). Live music is inherently social; an event, a display, a celebration, “an organic, living aspect of public life (hence the term—‘live’ music) whatever its technical or aesthetic qualities” (Frith 2002, p. 39). Music is the catalyst for participation, but it is the social aspect of a performance that helps to maintain the scene’s vibrancy. Musical practices can never be entirely separated from social processes (Kahn-Harris 2000, p. 25). Music scenes are inherently social and the human interactions that make up scenes are governed by the accumulation and exchange of social capital, as well as other forms of capital defined later in this chapter.

In professional and industry contexts networking is often used as an expression for the process of accumulating social capital7. The contacts gained from this process become part of an individual’s personal network and are relied upon in order to attain certain outcomes. These contacts provide opportunities for one to receive and use other forms of capital and ideally encourage the acquisition of valuable skills and traits. Through social capital individuals are able to utilise the strengths and skills of many while gaining advantages for themselves in the process. Reputation plays into social capital, as those that are more widely trusted in the scene command more of

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7 “Social capital is defined by Bourdieu (1997) as ‘social obligations’ or ‘connections’ ” (Edgerton and Roberts 2014, pp. 194-195). Although not the original source of the term, the writings of Bourdieu and his work on taste as a marker of social status have greatly influenced theories of social capital. As participation in live music scenes is inherently social, notions of cultural capital relate directly to social status and social capital.
a presence. The power of social capital in the music industry is particularly pertinent as an artist’s fame and reputation are key signifiers of their success. Social capital is therefore given further potency in local music scenes, as other hard forms of capital are relatively scarce in these fields. Theories around social capital have been developed further by contemporary sociologists such as Robert Putnam (2000). 8

Expanding on the more conventional concepts of human and physical capital, social capital has been a key topic of discussion in the debate surrounding the changing character of Western society; “[j]ust as a screw driver (physical capital) or a college education (human capital) can increase productivity (both individual and collective), so too do social contacts affect the productivity of individuals and groups” (Putnam 2000, pp. 18-19). This is due to the inherent value of social networks. Therefore, individuals with high social capital are able to draw on the advice, skills and expertise of other individuals or groups in order to accomplish common goals (Putnam 2000, p. 19). In the context of live music scenes, the accumulation of social capital is often predicated on an individuals’ status in the scene, as a network of key influential contacts may influence a participant’s standing in the scene. Further, one’s cultural capital also plays a large part in determining such status, as the right combination of networks and knowledge can be converted into niche career opportunities.

Social capital supports and invigorates community interaction and civic engagement. As an industry that relies heavily on face-to-face networking

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8 Robert Putnam discusses the source of the term ‘social capital’ in his book Bowling Alone (2000), citing twentieth century social reformer L.J. Hanifan. Hanifan emphasized the importance of public entertainment—“sociables”—in fostering social capital. His theory was that once members of a community are known to each other and have entered a practice of meeting regularly for public entertainment, social exchange, and personal satisfaction—circumstances in which social capital is readily generated—then through adroit governance and management social capital can be made use of to improve civic wellbeing generally (Hanifan 1916, in Putnam 2000, p. 19).
and personal relationships (Crewe and Beaverstock 1998), the music industry is driven by individuals whose social currency is significant and to whom social capital is extremely important. The informal nature of the music industry “blurs the business-social divide” (Watson 2008, p. 18), levelling the significance placed on social and business relationships to an equal standing. This is relevant in the context of local music scenes—wherein little financial gain is to be made—and is also consistent with cultural and creative industry workers in general, as the long hours spent socialising with others and the overlap between work and play generates a strong and affective community (Pratt 2000, p. 431). The exchanges and interactions that make up a music scene are therefore demonstrations of social capital at work.

Careers in the music industry depend on the complex interplay of individual traits and knowledge, personal relationships, diverse forms of ‘support’, and a multitude of other social, economic, and cultural factors (Threadgold 2015, p. 57). These factors, relationships and forms of support could otherwise be theorised as cultural, economic, and in particular, social capital. I therefore define social capital in the Bourdieusian sense, as a network of mutual support and opportunity at work in a specific cultural field, such as a local music scene. However, important to all cultural fields is symbolic capital, which I will now define in explicit terms.

**Symbolic capital**

Symbolic capital is a significant component of Bourdieu’s theory of power and capital. He equates symbolic capital with that of authority, notability, prestige, and fame, often coupling it with economic capital and other signifiers of power and success, as “the accumulation of economic capital merges with the accumulation of symbolic capital, that is, with the acquisition of a reputation for
competence and an image of respectability and honourability” (Bourdieu 1984, p. 291). For example, lawyers, doctors, judges, and politicians hold symbolic capital, as do those who excel in a chosen ‘field’, such as athletes, world-class scientists, and senior academics.

Symbolic capital is that which comes with status relative to a specific field, often holding power over other fields. Therefore, artists and musicians of considerable note and achievement may hold symbolic capital in the form of “awards, the prestige and status of chart placements, sales of recordings, website hits, effusive media reviews, winning talent competitions, commercially successful tours, public endorsements by established artists, and performances at prestigious venues or events” (Scott 2012, p. 245). Symbolic capital is therefore distinct from cultural capital as it holds value across many fields, or the broader ‘field of power’ (social space), which is structured by two competing principles: “the distribution of economic capital and the distribution of cultural capital” (Edgerton and Roberts 2014, p. 195). Symbolic capital is that which results from an alignment between economic and cultural capital wherein one is largely dependent on the other. However, cultural and symbolic capital are not the same, as symbolic capital supersedes cultural capital in almost all instances.

Symbolic capital can be framed as the meta-capital (Jensen 2006, p. 268); that which is most easily converted into economic capital. Symbolic capital is therefore often wielded by social actors operating outside of music scenes yet still have a significant effect on them, such as the police, policy-makers, and developers. Symbolic capital is therefore closely associated with the authorities and forces of gentrification that are a part of, and effect, the live music ecology. I discuss symbolic capital, the live music ecology, and the disparate actors and authorities that shape this ecology later in this chapter.
Subcultural capital

Fundamental to the live music ecology, local music scenes, and the small live music venues that house them are distinct forms of cultural capital that could otherwise be defined as ‘subcultural capital’. However, I make a distinction between cultural and subcultural forms of capital. In Club Cultures (1996), Sarah Thornton appropriates cultural capital for a popular music context, specifically that of British ‘rave’ culture. Thornton’s research highlights the social complexity of these environments, foregrounding the role that authenticity and ‘hipness’ play in establishing identity in these scenes. In applying Bourdieu’s (1984) theories of cultural and social capital to club cultures, Thornton goes a step further, conceiving ‘hipness’ as a form of subcultural capital. Much like cultural capital, ‘subcultural capital’ can be objectified in the form of fashionable haircuts and record collections, or embodied by those ‘in the know’ and through the use (but not over-use) of current slang (Thornton 1996, p. 11). For example, a clubber’s ‘hipness’ is defined “by a specialist insider knowledge of labels and genres, wearing the right clothes and attending clubs perceived and constructed as authentic” (Prior 2013, p. 186). However, subcultural capital has recently been critiqued, with scholars suggesting a need for the term to be updated (Jensen 2006; Threadgold 2015; Bloustien and Peters 2011).

While maintaining that the term is still a useful analytical tool, subcultural capital becomes problematic when the lines between it and cultural capital are blurred. This is because subcultural capital is only significant within ‘alternative’ fields of cultural production, whereas “things should only be thought of as a Bourdieu[s]ian form of cultural capital if it can be utilised for success in ‘legitimate’ fields” (Threadgold 2015, p. 54). Further, a distinction between ‘alternative’ and ‘legitimate’ fields is
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problematic. As has often been asserted in post-subcultural studies (Muggleton and Weinzierl 2003), subcultures and other niche fields of cultural production tend to reproduce the same hierarchies and processes of distinction present in mass culture. Therefore, much like ‘micro-scene’ (Grazian 2013), such distinctions between ‘alternative’ and ‘legitimate’ fields are often only cosmetic, as they are both governed by similar rules in the same ‘field of power’.

The problem inherent in a distinction between mass culture and subcultures—and by extension, subcultural capital—is that at their core, subcultures and other niche fields of cultural production (i.e. ‘alternative’ fields) reproduce the same hierarchical power structures observed in broader society, as “the same fundamental relationships, precisely those which express the major relations of order (high/low, strong/weak etc.) reappear in all class-divided societies” (Bourdieu 1984, p. 470). All fields reproduce broader power structures in their design. Contemporary live music scenes are just as heavily governed by class, taste, and distinction as the 1960s French theatre that Bourdieu was critiquing. Therefore, viewing them as subcultures and analysing them in terms of subcultural capital misrepresents them as being somehow removed from hegemony.

Subcultural capital also becomes less useful in an analysis of the live music ecology, as the kinds of disparate social actors whose interdependence the live music ecology relies on are not necessarily participants in either scenes or subcultures. Although live music scenes have very real boundaries to participation, they are essentially transient and porous, with constantly shifting social borders. To think of them as autonomous is to underestimate them. Such an assumption is also incompatible with an understanding of live music as an ecology. In contrast to ‘scene’, the live music ecology considers
the agency of those outside of music scenes and is subject to the influence of disparate social actors (e.g. the police, developers, policy-makers etc.) (Behr et al 2016). Therefore, a theory that accounts for the presence of a live music ecology beholden to outside forces (i.e. non-scene participants) cannot co-exist with a theory of autonomous subcultures or subcultural capital, as “[s]ubcultural capital is not a helpful form of cultural capital when negotiating with authoritarian ‘thems’ who come from outside the scene: bankers, council representatives, police, licence inspectors and so on” (Threadgold 2015, p. 59). Therefore, we need to move beyond definitions of subcultural capital and towards a post-subcultural understanding of Bourdieu’s theories as they apply to place-based live music scenes and the live music ecology.

Thornton defines club cultures as taste cultures, stating that clubbers assemble because of their shared consumption of media and their preference for people that engage in this sharing (1996). This definition of consumption reflects Bourdieu’s own, as “art has meaning and interest only for someone who possesses the cultural competence, that is, the code, into which it is encoded… A beholder who lacks the specific code feels lost in a chaos of sounds and rhythms, colours and lines, without rhyme or reasons” (1984, p. 2). Social capital comes back into play here and it is worth noting that socialising based on shared taste builds affinities towards these tastes, as participation in taste cultures strengthens individual knowledge of the meanings and values of such cultures (i.e. cultural capital), creating ‘ad hoc communities’ (Thornton 1996, p. 3). These are music scenes. However, despite the parallels between Thornton’s use of subcultural capital, ‘cultural capital’ is a more useful term when referring to the specificities of my thesis topic, particularly regarding the ‘live music ecology’. For example, cultural
capital is more readily transferable across and between disparate fields of cultural practice, as cultural capital is “closely tied to adult worlds and not separate enclaves or ‘terrains’ of youth culture” (Bloustien and Peters 2011, p. 103), such as subcultures. Furthermore, “subcultural capital denotes social recognition and status within the subcultural field and may not necessarily be of much symbolic trade value in the outside world” (Jensen 2006, p. 268). Subcultural capital is usually only exchangeable within subcultures. Therefore, a more appropriate term is needed to describe the markers of taste and status that govern music scenes and the live music ecology, one that is more easily converted into economic capital.

To summarise, viewing niche cultural activities as autonomous fields of production and consumption seems vain when these activities reflect and reproduce the same processes of distinction on a smaller scale. This can be seen in the role of gender in definitions of subculture, wherein:

...the caricature of the “poseur” who hops on the bandwagon and blindly conforms to the latest trends is often a young girl, a “teenybopper” as they were once called... This caricature is consistent with the ways that cultural hierarchies are cast in gendered discourses, where mass culture is devalued for its feminine qualities of dependence, superficiality, and sentimentality, while authentic culture is praised in masculine terms for being autonomous, virile, and uncompromising. (Moore 2005, p.235)

The hypocrisy apparent in a distinction between ‘mass’ and ‘authentic’ culture is obvious when we consider that social hierarchies are reproduced in all areas of cultural production and consumption. The absence of people of colour in the ‘rockist’ (Frere-Jones 2003; Sanneh 2004; Wolk 2006) venues of Melbourne’s inner-north is testament to this, as is the embracing of a colloquial working-class vernacular, even though many of the scene’s participants are middle-class professionals. This performance of class reflects contemporary understandings of identity as largely performative (Bennett and Peterson 2004; Bennett 2000; Chaney 1996). Therefore, I propose
‘scene’ as a more accurate descriptor of music-making and cultural production, as the term allows for flexibility in terms of social identity. Further, I identify the ‘live music ecology’ as a descriptor of the material infrastructure and concerns—the bricks-and-mortar venue spaces, along with ‘outsiders’ that impact on and police their development (developers, policymakers etc.)—necessary for music scenes to function. However, a distinction must be made between ‘live music scene’ as a distinct network of participants and the ‘live music ecology’ as a set of human and non-human factors that influence the production of live music events. These terms are discussed and defined here.

**Music scenes and subcultures**

Scenes have long been associated with popular music. ‘Scene’ is typically used as an everyday descriptor of various manifestations of collective musical life (Driver and Bennett 2015, p. 99). Will Straw provided an early scholarly definition of ‘scene’ as “that 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” (1991, p. 373). Straw’s definition stems from Barry Shank’s work on the music scene of Austin, Texas (1988), which defined ‘scene’ as the interactions between distinct musical practices and their practitioners in a specific geographical location. Building on this, Straw makes the distinction between a contemporary understanding of ‘scenes’ and previous notions of ‘musical communities’.

Prior to scene, ‘musical communities’ were theorised as relatively homogenous cultural groups, whose heritage contributed to the production and dissemination of musical idioms native to that group (Straw 1991, p. ...
Therefore, any contemporary music to develop out of these cultural groups was articulated in the context of each community’s distinct heritage. In contrast, Straw (1991) stresses that modern music scenes are comprised of a range of musical practices coexisting together and, more importantly, interacting with each other.

The term ‘scene’ differs from ‘subculture’, and Straw’s definition of ‘scene’ is distinctly post-subcultural (Bennett and Rogers 2016a, p. 13). Subculture rose to prominence as a descriptor of various music, fashion, and political movements in the late 1970s, emerging from the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) and its associated figures (Hall and Jefferson 1976; Hebdige 1979; Willis 1978). Class was central to the CCCS’s definition of subculture and its relationship to popular music. This drew on Marxist notions of power, Althusser’s writings on ideology (1984, 1969) and Gramsci’s hegemony (1971), to analyse a variety of youth cultures (as cited in Bennett and Rogers 2016a, p. 13).

The CCCS defined subcultural activity as resistance articulated through music-related youth movements. These were initially punk (Hebdige 1979), mods (Hebdige 1976), and skinheads (Clarke 1976a), but later included goth (Haenfler 2010; Hodkinson 2002), straight edge (Haenfler 2006, 2004; Nilan 2006; Wood 2003) and a multitude of others (Gelder and Thornton 1997; Haenfler 2014). These ‘subcultures’ used music, fashion, and lifestyle choices to articulate themselves as group identities with an identifiable homology, creating “new social identities and reclaim[ing] cultural space for youth within a dislocating parent culture” (Bennet and Rogers 2016a, p. 14). Herein lies the primary point of distinction between ‘scene’ and ‘subculture’, as “the study of ‘subcultures’ reads into the activities and textual production of social actors as an articulation of group identity and resistance, while ‘scene’ defines
such articulations as multiplicitous at the level of the individual and asks what this means for subjectively lived out cultural identities” (Driver and Bennett 2015, p. 104).

Subcultures are defined as collective identities. They are often aligned with political movements apparent in the music, art, fashion, and cultural artefacts aligned with each subculture. Scene, on the other hand, allows for a subjective experience of culture, one that is often complex, eclectic, and doesn’t necessitate politics or a defined ideology. An extension of the work of the CCCS and Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital (1984), Sarah Thornton’s use of subcultural capital has recently come under criticism alongside broader critiques of ‘subculture’ as an accurate descriptor of cultural practice. Jensen, for example, notes that Thornton’s definition of subcultural capital lacks intersectionality (2006). He calls for a more nuanced understanding of subcultures and subcultural capital, stating that “the relation between the subculture and its surroundings is best understood by focusing on what is appreciated within the subculture (i.e. subcultural capital) and at the same time analytically situating the subculture in terms of class, gender, ethnicity and ‘race’” (Jensen 2006, p. 257). However, this reliance on ‘subculture’ as a descriptor of social practice is problematic, as the term itself has largely fallen out of favour (Muggleton and Weinzierl 2003). Although it is useful to consider a hierarchy of culture with a variety of codes and signs embedded in each layer (Jensen 2006, p. 263), to accept a theory of subcultural capital is to buy into the concept of subcultures and their continued proliferation, an assumption that has been criticised throughout the literature since the 1990s (Weinzierl and Muggleton 2003, p. 4).

Jensen’s argument relies on a presumption that subcultures are socially autonomous. While critiquing Thornton’s use of subcultural capital, he
simultaneously defends the term stating, “[t]he notion of subcultural capital could help us… through potentially grasping the relative autonomy of subcultures without defocusing social structure” (2006, p. 260). His solution is to take an intersectional approach, accounting for the various social pressures and power structures that are ever-present in and around subcultures by “relating the types of subcultural capital ‘found’ in various subcultures to intersections between the social position, gender, ethnicity and ‘race’ of the participants in the subculture” (Jensen 2006, p. 263). However, I would like to critique this idea of subcultures as autonomous.

Subcultures require a parent or ‘hegemonic’ culture to articulate themselves in opposition to or in distinction from. This is problematic in the current age of fluid and performative identity, as sites and practices of cultural production and consumption are often subsumed by mass culture and cannot be easily separated from it. The concept of subcultures “clashes with contemporary concerns about globalisation, the ambiguities of resistance and the heterogeneity of identity” (Kahn-Harris 2000, p. 14). Articulations of identity through consumption and taste have become more multifaceted and complex in the age of cultural omnivorousness, online media, and globalisation. These new ways of being challenge the assumption that subcultures and the parent culture that they are propped up against are somehow monolithic and autonomous. Further, the concept of a ‘subculture’ implies that both it and the parent culture that it sets itself apart from are somehow consistent, homogenous socio-cultural formations. Yet “contemporary youth cultures are characterised by far more complex stratifications than that suggested by the simple dichotomy of ‘monolithic mainstream’ — ‘resistant subcultures’” (Weinzierl and Muggleton 2003, p. 7). Belonging to a subculture is often framed as a monolithic ‘way of being’ that
does not allow for the kind of broad cultural consumption that has come to define life in late-modernity (Peterson and Bennett 2004, p. 3), as “consumers no longer restrict their tastes to elite forms of art… but participate in a heterogeneous range of cultural practices and receive some degree of prestige from doing so” (Prior 2013, p. 187). This ‘prestige’ could otherwise be framed as cultural or even symbolic capital, as opposed to subcultural capital, which becomes less relevant in an age of cultural omnivorousness due to the limits of its application. These new modes of consumption have significant implications for subcultures, as previous understandings of the term implied “a tight-knit, rigidly bounded, implacably ‘resistant’, male-dominated, geographically specific social space (if such formations ever did exist)” (Kahn-Harris 2000, p. 14). Subculture cannot effectively account for the modern way in which music is produced and consumed nor the transience of music scenes, as neither are homogenous or monolithic.

I avoid ‘subculture’ as a descriptor of sociality and musical practice as “it presumes that a society has one commonly shared culture from which the subculture is deviant… [and] that all of a participant’s actions are governed by subcultural standards” (Peterson and Bennett 2004 p. 3). Unlike subcultures, music scenes are articulated via social activities, shared musical interests, and a sense of common ground between participants, yet are ultimately transient and adhere to an anti-essentialist definition of identity (Bennett 2004, 1997; Bennett, Stratton and Peterson 2008; Bennett and Rogers 2016a, 2016b; Peterson and Bennett 2004; Straw 2001, 1991). As Driver and Bennett state, “[a] key value of scene as a conceptual framework is the more affective, emotive, fluid and trans-local qualities that it brings to our understanding of musicalised meaning and practice in everyday life”
(2015, p. 101). This transience is the result of the dispersal of culture through globalisation and the repositioning of popular music in people’s everyday lives, engagement with and access to which has increased exponentially due to the proliferation of the Internet, mobile devices, and streaming services. Thus, while the work of the CCCS can still be regarded as pioneering, “they no longer appear to reflect the political, cultural and economic realities of the twenty-first century” (Weinzierl and Muggleton 2003, p. 5). We must therefore move towards a post-subcultural understanding of music-making.

Globalisation has affected historic change in modern music scenes. The building of musical affinities and interactions across scenic boundaries all contribute to a scene’s sense of identity (Straw 1991, p. 373). We can distinguish two defining factors in music-making practices: one which grounds them in local music heritage and another that encourages pluralisation and eclecticism. The point of ‘scene’ as a term is not to designate particular cultural spaces as specific to one or the other, but to examine “the ways in which particular musical practices ‘work’ to produce a sense of community within the conditions of metropolitan music scenes” (Straw 1991, pp. 373). The sense of community found in local music scenes springs from a collective experience of participation that, although influenced by international styles and a globalised aesthetic, is enacted on a local level, giving rise to communities based around musical styles and the venues in which their performance takes place (Straw 1991). Furthermore, music scenes are grounded in “the ongoing transformation of social and cultural relations—and of alliances between particular musical communities—occurring within the context of the contemporary Western city” (Straw 1991, p. 375). This implies social exchange, particularly those exchanges that occur at the point where scenes intersect. The boundaries of
music scenes are what both defines and distorts them as social phenomena and it is easier to distinguish scenes in terms of how they are constructed rather than what they are constructed of.

Previous scholars have defined scene as “forms of collective activity that engender strong feelings of membership but do not spring from an ongoing community” (Bennett, Stratton and Peterson 2008, p. 593). They state that music scenes can be both geographically specific spaces for the articulation of multiple musical practices and musical communities that are articulated simultaneously, in many spaces and across a range of sites. Further, “scenesters need not be committed to a single scene, but may participate in several,” (Bennett, Stratton and Peterson 2008, p. 593). The nebulousness of the term is what gives it its potency, as “no musical practice can take place entirely separately from social processes. The implication is that scenes include everything... since all contribute to and feed off a larger space(s) of musical practice” (Kahn-Harris 2000, p. 25). The inherent interconnectedness of musical practice and social process is central to this thesis and is discussed in my data analysis. It reflects the significance of social and cultural capital in music scenes, as these are essential to the construction and sustainability of scenes.

The term ‘music scene’ denotes a group of participants that are tied to music-making by way of participation and interaction. This positions live music as something of collective value, as music scenes are “not tied to preexisting notions of community grounded in class and tradition but rather facilitat[e] new forms of collectivity and connectivity that centre upon shared participation in more recent forms of material culture” (Driver and Bennett 2015, p. 101). The sharing of mutual interests between participants is a
fundamental part of any music scene. The scene itself is therefore articulated in the interactions and exchanges between participants.

Unlike subcultures, scenes are not clearly defined or replicable. Subcultures are articulated as a set of ideas, fashions, aesthetics and symbolic markers that make up something identifiable (Clarke 1976b, p. 179; Willis 1972). Scenes, however, exist only insofar as there are participants to engage with them. Motives beyond the live music experience—such as interactions external to the production and performance of live music—are a key component of music scenes. This emphasises the role of live music as a mediated practice where mutual interest in the performance provides an opportunity for relationship building, through which participants may accumulate and exchange social capital.

The cultural capital gained from engaging with live music facilitates access to certain spaces and social networks; the live music ‘scene’ (Snell and Hodgetts 2007, p. 438). Cultural and social capital play a large part in scenes, giving them a set of markers to group themselves around. However, these can be renegotiated and adapted depending on context, as participants need not be committed to one scene and may participate in several. Further, examples of cultural capital, “such as dressing a certain way, frequenting a bar and dancing are central to community maintenance and the reaffirmation of shared identities” (Snell and Hodgetts 2007, p. 430).

Much of the experience of engaging with live music is dependent on the venue space. Space limits how participants move. This experience of space also relates to one’s habitus, capital, and position in social space. We can extend this understanding of social space to a participants’ interaction with the venue itself and their habitus in this space, as “[t]he economic and social conditions which [capital] presuppose… are very closely linked to the
different possible positions in social space and, consequently, bound up with the systems of dispositions (habitus) characteristic of the different classes and class fractions” (Bourdieu 1984, pp. 5-6). The role of social space in music scenes is apparent in small venues, as these spaces exist on the level of the local and the commonplace, and are part of a cultural field with a strong relationship with place; the local music scene. Participants engage with these spaces on an everyday level and are more likely to be ‘locals’ or ‘regulars’ than the broader demographic of participants encompassed within large concert audiences. These small venues are part of a network of spaces that I refer to as the ‘live music ecology’. However, before discussing and defining this ecology in more detail I must first define the multiple modes through which scene is articulated.

**Local and translocal scenes**

Since the advent of the internet, definitions of music scenes have become fragmented (Bennett and Peterson 2004; Stratton 2008). Local music scenes are bound by space and geographical boundaries; a network of participants operating in a demarcated, tangible place. Local scenes extend beyond musicians and their fans to incorporate venue owners, proprietors, management, staff, booking agents, other cultural gatekeepers, publicists, label representatives, and local enthusiasts. Here “the notion of music scene becomes a form of collective association and a means through which individuals with different relationships to a specific genre of music produced in a particular space articulate a sense of collective identity and belonging” (Driver and Bennett 2015, p. 100). The role of identity and place-making is particularly strong in local music scenes and it is in the everyday practices of participants that scene bears the most similarities to a ‘musical community’
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(Straw 1991, p. 373). However, unlike a musical community local scenes are sustained by global trends and practices, and are further influenced by rival local scenes that compete for many of the same spaces, resources and participants (Bennett, Stratton and Peterson 2008, p. 594). The live music scene of Melbourne can be defined as ‘local’. Furthermore, genre specific scenes connected to specific venues also fit this description of a local music scene. Melbourne’s inner-north, which includes my case study venues, can be viewed as its own distinct scene. However, as local scenes don’t exist in a vacuum, many of them function as nodes of participation in broader translocal networks.

Translocal scenes are built upon inter and intra-scene communication between musicians and enthusiasts dedicated to the same types of music. Translocal scenes are reliant on the nexus between musical consumption and lifestyle, as participants build strong ties by sharing and participating in ways of living that are associated with the music they love (Peterson and Bennett 2004). This definition fits Straw’s observations of the North American ‘alternative’ music scene of the 1980s and early 1990s (1991). The ubiquitousness of ‘alternative music’ at that time, the fact that it was both: a) a manifestation of quasi-standardised musical practices to be found in all major urban centres; and b) a national, and—with the advent of ‘grunge’—soon-to-be- global movement, lent ‘alternative rock’ a distinct sense of translocality.

Rising from the DIY practices and entrepreneurialism of punk and hardcore, ‘alternative rock’ relied on the same independent modes of production, distribution, and dissemination as punk. The infrastructure (or ‘ecology’, as I will define it later) that developed out of the local punk scenes (the independent record labels, small venues etc.) were later utilised in a
variety of other independent musical activities, forming a network of scenes across the United States of America (USA) and Canada. However, ‘alternative rock’ had less to do with aesthetic concerns and more to do with time and place:

As the centrality of punk within local musical cultures declined, the unity of alternative rock no longer resided in the stylistic qualities of the music embraced within it. Rather, that unity has come to be grounded more fundamentally in the way in which such spaces of musical activity have come to establish a distinctive relationship to historical time and geographical location. (Straw 1991, p. 375)

This decentralisation lent the role of localism in alternative rock a paradoxical status. By relying on region-specific modes of production and distribution, alternative scenes were inherently local, yet the musical practices of alternative rock were easily dispersed, replicated, and reproduced, encouraging a uniformity of style that facilitated the translocal nature of the scene. In other words, “[t]he development of alternative-rock culture may be said to follow a logic in which a particular pluralism of musical languages repeats itself from one community to another” (Straw 1991, p. 378). This reflects a translocal mode wherein “a particularly stable set of musical languages and relationships… has been reproduced within a variety of local circumstances,” (Straw 1991, p. 379). The 1990s ‘alternative rock’ scene of North America was therefore a translocal scene.

Since the publication of Straw’s essay (1991), translocal scenes have remained a topic of focus in the study of popular music (Hodkinson 2004; Kahn-Harris 2007; Laing 1997; Schilt 2004). As a musical culture that is heavily affected by processes of globalisation, the Australian music scene could also be described as translocal, as could the genre-specific scenes that traverse the country’s major urban centres. Australian music scenes are significantly affected by geography due to the way in which our densely
concentrated population is grouped in the country’s capital cities (Bennett, Stratton and Peterson 2008, p. 595). Australian live music scenes are therefore more noticeably influenced by ‘city cultures’, rather than a homogenous national music culture (Bennett, Stratton and Peterson 2008, p. 595). These city cultures dominate the musical landscape of Australia (Brunt and Stahl 2018), with the music scenes of each city often referred to by practitioners, participants and enthusiasts as distinct (e.g. the Melbourne music scene, the Brisbane music scene etc.).

Community radio stations, local music scenes, city-centric live music ecologies and, until recently, a decentralised music press have served to reinforce the narrative of city cultures. However, although local scenes exist on the level of everyday life in the cities, genre-specific translocal scenes exist between and across the regional and urban centres. Bands and artists that identify with these genres often tour together and will collaborate on releases remotely. The advent of the Internet has made it easier for translocal scenes to articulate themselves and in a country as geographically isolated as Australia (particularly from the rest of the Anglophone world), such translocalism is ever important, as global live music scenes—such as heavy metal (Kahn-Harris 2007) and dance (Laing 1997)—are harder for Australian artists to access given their distance from international touring circuits.

In the Australian context, local scenes are clearly defined by space, place and each city’s urban boundaries, whereas translocal scenes— influenced by genre and musical aesthetics—criss-cross state borders and draw on local scenes for context and cohesion. Australia is therefore an interesting case study in the relationship between localism and translocalism, as local scenes feed into the translocal network. Therefore, a national ‘live
music ecology’ can be seen to exist, as local scenes, dominated by those in the major cities, grow and make connections with translocal networks. Although steps have been made to nationalise Australia’s music industry, the nation’s local music scenes remain concentrated in urban centres, particularly the larger east coast cities of Brisbane, Sydney, and Melbourne. The relationship that local music scenes share with the cities they inhabit is particularly visible in the Australian context, emphasising a translocal national live music scene that frames the local music scenes of each urban centre as nodes of participation, production, and consumption in a broader translocal network. Thus, the musical practices of Australia’s music scenes are defined in similar terms to Straw’s understanding of 1990s ‘alternative rock’, in which “the relationship of different local spaces of activity to each other takes the form of circuits, overlaid upon each other, through which particular styles of alternative music circulate in the form of recordings or live performances” (1991, p. 379). Such a definition reflects modern definitions of place and its intersection with sociality; scene as a series of ‘moments’ in time and place that intersect with the social relations that make up a participants day-to-day (Massey 1994). Like scenes, “some of these relations will be… contained within the place; others will stretch beyond it, tying any particular locality into wider relations and processes in which other places are implicated too” (Massey 1994, p. 120). Drawing on this understanding of place, it can be seen that each Australian city features its own discrete music scenes that exist on a translocal scale, intersected by touring networks and influenced by an increasingly homogenised national music culture. We can therefore observe Australian music scenes in both local and translocal terms.
Expanding on his initial writings, Straw elaborated on scene’s elasticity as a term stating, “‘[s]cene’ is used to circumscribe highly local clusters of activity and to give unity to practices dispersed across the world. It functions to designate face-to-face sociability and as a lazy synonym for globalized virtual communities of taste” (2001, p. 248). Straw’s realignment of ‘scene’ places an emphasis on the concept’s social implications and the way in which the everyday activities that make up the scene are submerged in a kind of common-sense or ‘doxa’ (Bourdieu 2000, p. 16). Here, ‘doxa’ is defined as “pre-reflexive, shared but unquestioned opinions and perceptions… which determine ‘natural’ practice and attitudes via the internalized ‘sense of limits’ and habitus of [social] agents” (Deer 2012, p. 115). Doxa are therefore the everyday norms that guide cultural consumption and influence how social agents—scene participants—interact with both culture and each other. Furthermore, although doxa “lose visibility within the mundane activities of buying drinks or discussing shared interests… they are perpetuated within such activities, absorbed within the thicker tissues of urban sociability” (Straw 2001, p. 256). The role of everyday sociality in music scenes and the rituals through which such sociality is enacted is evident here, and is further reflected in Bennett’s research on northern English ‘pub rock’ (1997).

Bennett focuses on the sense of enjoyment local musicians gain from participating in musical practices that facilitate a distinctly social environment, such as those that occur in small live music venues. According to participants, the positive characteristics of such an environment include familiar faces and spaces, an ongoing rapport between musicians and their audience, and the opportunity to drink and socialise as “both musicians and audience become highly attuned to the commonality of social experience that bonds them together… playing a decisive role in framing the politics of
performance and reception” (Bennett 1997, p. 99). Local music scenes are built on complex systems of sociality, cultural and social capital, and habitus. It is from this perspective that I have approached the music scenes and live music ecology that encompass my field of research; not in terms of what they are defined by—musical genres, cultural signifiers etc.—but more so by how they are constructed through human interactions and exchange, processes defined by social and cultural capital.

The role of the social in any notion of scene influences the very nature of the scene itself. Music scenes are comprised of social actors, who contribute to how scenes are articulated through their interactions. A description of people gathered in a bar, a live music venue, or any other cultural space as a ‘scene’ “presumes that moments of seemingly purposeless sociability are caught up in the production of conspiratorial intrigues, projects and group identities” (Straw 2001, p. 250). Participants in music scenes create, promote and sustain identities that are bigger than themselves through collective participation and an identifiable group dynamic. This is enacted in Straw’s so-called “purposeless sociability”, an ongoing process that is perpetuated by “the mundane activities of buying drinks or discussing shared interests” (Straw 2001, p. 256), yet sustains music scenes on a fundamental level.

The spaces in which this “purposeless sociability” takes place are imbued with a collective history; what Gallan and Gibson refer to as “vernacular cultural history” (2013, p. 174). In the context of live music venues, vernacular culture⁹ implicates cultural heritage (MacKinnon 1994, p. 66), musical memory (Cohen 2013, p. 580), small-scale musical activities

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⁹ Vernacular culture is that which is collectively imagined, enacted and re-told by those that participate in said culture. It is informed by the vernacular knowledge and experience of its participants (i.e. cultural capital) and the articulations of social identity to which such knowledge
(Homan 2008, p. 253), street-level culture and traditions (Jayne, Hollo-way and Valentine 2006, p. 459), and the grass-roots cultural industries that depend on small venues to give them meaning (Waitt and Gibson 2009, p. 1234). Bennett and Rogers’ work on music scenes and cultural memory discusses vernacular culture (2016a; 2016b), demonstrating how it is informed by collective memories; mutual cultural capital. These become textured by participants’ experiences of particular venues, forging associations between musicians, audiences, scenes, and the venues that make them up (2016b, p. 490).

Australian ethnographies of small venues, such as Brendan P. Smyly’s doctoral thesis on The Sandringham Hotel (2010) and Ben Gallan and Chris Gibson’s paper on Wollongong’s Oxford Tavern (2013), have focused on specific live music venues. These venues are framed as sites of vernacular cultural history (Gallan and Gibson 2013; Gallan 2012; Shorthose 2004; Rahnema 1997), which gives such spaces character and identity. Vernacular cultural history is shared cultural capital reified in space, an articulation of cultural capital that participants benefit from collectively through their engagement with the venue space. This informs vernacular culture, which is shared between participants in a perpetual state of change.

Previous research on vernacular culture and music scenes centres on ideas of place-making, documenting the oral histories of venues and exploring how the stories and narratives of their patrons imbue them with meaning. In this context, “[s]cenes extend the spatialization of city cultures through the grafting of tastes or affinities to physical locations” (Straw 2001, p. 254). As spaces of performance—and cultural production and consumption—music venues act as repositories of vernacular culture (Gallan and Gibson 2013; Gallan 2012; Shorthose 2004; Rahnema 1997). They are
not only performance spaces but also places wherein performances are experienced, appreciated and discussed. Venues can therefore be reframed as ‘social space’\(^\text{10}\). The commonality of experience shared between musicians and their audience plays a significant role in framing discourses of performance in social space. These contribute to each participants’ sense of habitus and their position in the field. The small venues in which such experiences take place are therefore aligned with specific sets of socio-cultural norms—doxa—, through which the field itself is re-perpetuated and reproduced. We can draw parallels between live music scenes and Bourdieu’s understanding of “cogni-tive structures”—those internalised, embodied structures that social agents implement through their practical knowledge of the world (Bourdieu 1984, p. 468)—in that scenes are often taken for granted by individuals, and are engaged in without substantial reflection. The assumptions of music scene participants are maintained across the scene, perpetuated in the interactions that take place. These assumptions are often internalised and lack reflexivity. Such biases categorise and define venues, musicians, and scenes through processes of distinction, resulting in an understanding of music scenes that is aligned with Bourdieu’s “common-sense world” (1984, p. 468).

The cycle of social and cultural practices that form the “common-sense world” of music scenes repeats, becoming more potent and entrenched as the field of the local music scene grows, taking in new spaces and participants. This cycle tends to favour the mundane over the spectacular, as the ‘everyday’ takes precedence over the extraordinary. As Straw states, “[s]cenes regularize these activities within the rituals of drinking

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10 “The term field is most often used to describe forms of social action or interaction in which geographic space is less important than social action, and given more or less attention depending on the analyst. Social space, in contrast, is a concept for which the question of the relationship between social and physical or geographic space is central” (Reed-Danahay 2015, p. 70).
or dining, or subject them to the frequency of accidental encounters… In this process, the spectacular loses visibility, dispersed within multiple sites of encounter or consumption” (2001, p. 255). The ‘everyday practices’ of scene participants strengthen the scene’s presence in the globalised context of the city, and form part of “a creative process whereby members of particular local scenes construct shared narratives of everyday life” (Peterson and Bennett 2004, p. 7). Such narratives add to the discourse of musical activity on a grassroots level.

The exchange between local and global musical practices reflects definitions of translocal scenes and Straw’s analysis of alternative rock (1991). Regional reworkings of global cultural resources into local sensibilities are inevitably influenced by the practitioners that enact them (Bennett 1997, p. 98), putting the local inside the global. Therefore, “[i]f ‘geography matters’, and if place is important, this is not only because the character of a particular place is a product of its position in relation to wider forces, but also because that character, in turn, stamps its own imprint on those wider forces” (Morley 1992, p. 282). The local cannot exist without the global (Peterson and Bennett 2004, p. 3). The influence of ‘city cultures’ emphasises their role as cultural transistors, as outposts of global cosmopolitan culture. ‘Scene’ is particularly useful here, as it “seems able to evoke both the cosy intimacy of community and the fluid cosmopolitanism of urban life” (Straw 2001, p. 248). A city’s music scene fulfils both, straddling community and culture. Straw’s assertion reflects those made previously regarding Australian city cultures, in that “urban scenes will almost always be perceived as lively, productive social spaces” (Straw 2001, p. 256). A city’s music scene and its cultural resources sustain it beyond the context of globalisation. City cultures feed on international trends but also sit
apart from them. The Internet has played the largest role in this exchange, contributing to the rise of the ‘virtual scene’\textsuperscript{11}. However, this thesis focuses on the local music scene of Melbourne’s inner-north, limiting itself to the activities and interactions that take place in the scene’s small venues, specifically The Old Bar and The Tote. These small venues serve as the grassroots for a broader ‘live music ecology’.

The live music ecology

I define the social aspect of small live music venues—the scene—as the foundation of the live music ecology. It is my contention that ‘scene’ and ‘ecology’ are distinct yet overlapping terms that are both useful and necessary in any analysis of local music-making practices, the venues in which they occur, and the social, economic, and cultural conditions that impact such spaces. I define scene in the section below, and discuss the differences between scene and the live music ecology.

To make this as clear as possible, I define ‘scene’ as including the following:

- Participants in a cultural practice, in this instance local music-making. This not only includes the musicians, but all of those ‘insiders’ that are engaged with the scene—either peripherally or directly—such as the door staff, the bar staff and shift managers, casual and dedicated punters, venue owners, and other music industry workers and audience members. These scene

\begin{footnote}
A virtual scene “involves direct Net-mediated person-to-person communication between fans… the creation of chat-rooms or list-serves dedicated to the scene and may involve the trading of music and images online” (Peterson and Bennett 2004, p. 11). Virtual scenes centre on new types of interactions that occur between musicians and fans by means of participatory communication technology and the Web 2.0 phenomena (Bennett 2004, 2002). Increased Internet access since the 1990s has resulted in fan-sites dedicated to cult and obscure artists, monitored by groups of isolated yet interconnected fans. This has increased the popularity of these artists (Kibby 2000), along with improving access for young artists.
\end{footnote}
participants are all engaged in an ongoing process of identity construction and disruption, as scenes change and develop through their continued participation.

- Scene also includes the social processes that develop around these participants and their cultural practice. Certain social and cultural relations might be specific to a scene, and therefore identified closely with it. Such social and cultural relations contribute to the sense of identity that scenes hold, although this identity is not rigid, but porous and fluid.

- Finally, time and place is integral to discussions of scene, especially local music scenes. The popularity of certain musical genres and the influence of key players shifts and changes over time, and their prominence is often specific to a geographical place, although the boundaries of this place are also subject to change.

It is through such an understanding of scene that we can see that it is very closely associated with people, their actions and interactions, and the time and place wherein these interactions occur. However, what is apparent here is the lack of a discussion of material concerns, in particular the materiality of venue spaces, their limitations and facilities. Also missing is a discussion of ‘outsiders’; social agents that are not scene participants, but whose actions greatly effect the scene itself. These might include the police, policymakers, building developers, the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA)—who are responsible for monitoring ‘noise pollution’—, and other outsiders whose actions have an effect on music scenes. Finally, scene is lateral in its articulation, and does not account for the way in which live music events are scalable, requiring a variety of spaces in order to function and facilitate an
ongoing and sustainable live music culture, from the pub to the stadium (Behr, Brennan, and Cloonan 2014).

Live music ecologies are dependent on the materiality of venue spaces and how readily such venues can be adapted for the performance of live music. Hence, live music ecologies rely on venue spaces for their reification whereas music scenes are more obtuse and less concrete, as they are based primarily on social interaction and exchange. The live music ecology also considers the influence of social actors that operate outside of the scene, such as policymakers, liquor licensing officers, and the police. Unlike scenes, which are more transient ‘moments’, the live music ecology is reliant on an ongoing live music culture.

If scenes are transient and exist across multiple spaces and places simultaneously both locally and translocally, then the live music ecology is more fixed and refers to those spaces and organisations that serve as infrastructure for each scene. These may be run by scene participants, such as independent record labels or informal live music venues or they might be official government bodies that are removed from the scene such as the Arts Council of Australia, a federal funding body.

The live music ecology exists on a vertical scale; a pyramid “whereby different venues – of all sizes – display interdependence, alongside different promotional practices” (Behr, Brennan and Cloonan 2014, p. 3), with small venues—“the so called ‘toilet circuit’” (Behr, Brennan and Cloonan 2014, p. 5)—comprising the ecology’s foundation, upon which the rest of a city or country’s live music ecology is built. Scene, by comparison, is more lateral in its articulation. Organisations included in the live music ecology wield more power than individual participants in scenes. That is not to say that scene participants do not hold power, but this power is articulated through social
and cultural capital within the scene, all of which is difficult to transact and exchange outside of the scene without engaging with ecological agents.

The live music ecology is often affected by outsiders. An arts policy advisor or representative of the EPA might not have much to do with Melbourne’s live music scene, but their power over the live music ecology—and underlying scene by extension—is far-reaching. Similar can be said of academics, politicians, and corporate sponsors (Walmsley 2016, p. 15). This power is articulated in the form of symbolic and economic capital, those types of capital that are the most concrete, tangible, and readily convertible (Bourdieu 1997). More integral to music scenes are cultural and social capital. With this in mind, a system of associations, exchanges and human interactions (social capital) that supports and encourages the flow of ideas (cultural capital) between individuals (the scene) and institutions (the live music ecology) can be seen to exist (Landry 2008, p.133). In this context, the scene is made up of individual participants. The venues these participants regularly visit, as well as local government bodies, advocacy groups, ‘outsider’ agents, and other organisations whose influence effects these venues and the scenes articulated amongst them, form the live music ecology. Scenes are therefore distinct from the live music ecology itself, but intrinsic in its makeup.

Music scenes and the live music ecology intersect at multiple levels and are both dependent on each other for their mutual manifestation. Live music ecologies are inherently more localised than scenes as they are dependent on the materiality of venue spaces and the interdependence of local social actors to give them form (Behr et al 2016). I define and discuss the live music ecology further in Chapter Four, teasing out the concept through an analysis of my case study venues and in the context of and a comparison between

**Place, space, and ‘the everyday’**

The live, small venue ‘gig’ is that most accessible and intimate of performances; those which take place in the local pubs, clubs, and other small live music venues of a city. Gigs are specific to time and place; they contribute to the ongoing musical activities of a city and provide social agents participating in such activities—the scene—with a place to congregate and socialise. Although the Internet has changed the way music scenes organise themselves, local music scenes still articulate themselves in relation to small venue gigs and other live music events. These give them context, a social event to organise themselves around, a space to meet, and the means to construct collective identity. Regular gigging opportunities provide musicians with exposure, income, and the chance to hone their craft in front of a live audience, while audiences that attend small local gigs are able to engage with place-based music scenes on an accessible, everyday level, due to the ubiquitousness of gigs and their low cost of entry.

The link between small gigs and placed-based music scenes has led to the emergence of internationally recognised musical movements, such as the punk scenes of New York and London during the mid-to-late 1970s and the grunge boom of Seattle in the early 1990s. Such scenes rely on a sustainable live music culture of small gigs, providing musicians with performance opportunities and scene participants with the means to network and socialise. Without regular live gigs performed on a local, everyday and small-scale level, music scenes would not flourish. The small live gig is what
simultaneously grounds music scenes in local processes of meaning-making, and encourages their development into something bigger than the sum of their parts.

The ubiquity of local gigs and small venues make ‘the live gig’ identifiable as distinct phenomena in live music studies. However, previous studies of popular music and place-based music scenes have focused largely on the relationship between the city, live music venues, and musicians (Cohen 2013, 1991; Bennett 1997; Finnegan 1989; Shank 1994, 1988). The concept of a music scene has been theorised further (Bennett and Rogers 2016a; Rogers 2008; Straw 2001, 1991), and such discussions have extended to include the ‘live music ecology’ (Behr et al 2016; Behr, Brennan, and Cloonan 2014). However, more recent research focusses on popular music and space, rather than place (Gallan and Gibson 2013; Gallan 2012; Holt 2014; Kronenburg 2012, 2011) and this shift in discourse is worthy of further consideration.

This section will provide a definition of the ‘live gig’ and a discussion of how it differs from other live music events, specifically its small scale and its ubiquitousness as an ‘everyday’ live music experience. This is followed by an overview of the field of live music studies, before moving onto a broader consideration of how these ideas play out in relation to musicians, audiences, and the live music experience. Overall, this section examines the role that space and place—specifically small venue spaces—play in facilitating live music scenes, how gigs provide opportunities to engage with live music on an everyday level, and how local music scenes rely on gigs for meaning-making.
Live music and space

Small live music venues provide the means for music scenes to articulate themselves at the level of the local and commonplace. Further, small gigs are inherently shaped by the venue spaces in which they take place. Robert Kronenburg has written at length on the nuances of live music venues and their design, focusing on the architecture of performance spaces (2012), while creating a ‘typology of venues’ (2011) and analysing the cultural and social effect of these spaces on the experience of live performance. He argues that throughout the literature on live music, place has taken precedence as a descriptor, whereas small live music events are more clearly defined by space:

Place can mean the country, region, city, neighbourhood and the actual venue. In recent years there has been considerable recognition of the importance of place as a defining factor in popular music development… However, the vast majority of this illuminating research has dealt with geographical place rather than physical space—comparatively little has examined the location of popular music performance in terms of the building in which the experience actually happens. (2012, p. 5)

The small live gig is dependent on both place and space to give it meaning and to shape the experiences of those engaging with the musical event. The idiosyncrasies of the small live music event are difficult to measure, record, and reproduce (Kronenburg 2012, p. 4). No two small gigs are the same and their differences are articulated largely in the spaces in which they take place. The size of the venue, its decor, its clientele, the way patrons move through the space, and how audiences interact with the musicians all contribute to an understanding of the small gig as accessible and commonplace. My research...

12 This typology identifies adopted, adapted, and dedicated live music venues. Adopted spaces are not purpose-built for performance, and are temporarily set-up for music-making activities. Adapted spaces are altered from their original purpose for the continued and regular performance of music. Dedicated spaces are purpose built for musical performance (Kronenburg 2011, pp. 140-141).
emphasises the venue spaces themselves, suggesting a departure from previous studies of local scenes and live music venues, which have often focused on place and its ongoing influence. A gap in the literature is identified here, along with an opportunity to address this gap with new research on small venue spaces.

Just as music scenes can be defined as multiplicitous but at the same time discrete, occupying multiple spaces across a distinct network of activity, space too can be theorised as open yet demarcated, singular yet multiple. Certainly, “space is a discrete multiplicity, but one in which the elements of that multiplicity are themselves imbued with temporality… The argument here is instead to understand space as an open ongoing production… that space itself is an event” (Massey 2005, p. 55). Theorising space as an event reflects a similar understanding of music scenes, defining them as a series of ongoing events within space. This allows for the transient nature of music scenes, yet fixes them to space and place, the materiality of which is fundamental to the live music ecology. A renewed focus on ‘space as scene’ presents a shift in the conversation around local music scenes, which in the past have been identified and aligned with a geographical place; a region, city or town. This shift reorientates the discussion to centre on an understanding of venues as social space.

The notion of ‘social space’ can be transmuted into physical space and the two concepts are closely related. Small live music venues are good examples of “reified social space” (Bourdieu 2000, p. 134), as they are often aligned with a specific music scene or a number of scenes while also serving as the grassroots for a broader live music ecology. Throughout his work, Bourdieu discussed the alignment between social and physical space, co-implicating the two and asserting that “the places or localizations that people
Chapter 2 - Key Concepts and Literature Review

inhabit are related to their position in social space” (Reed-Danahay 2015, p. 81). Scene participants who frequent particular small venues occupy a similar social space to one another. This is what a scene is; social actors coming together to participate in the same social, cultural, and physical space.

Small venues are inherently imbued with meanings that go beyond the live music experience, facilitating a transient community that centres on engagement; the live music scene. Music scenes are fluid and ephemeral, and their relationship with time and space can be framed in a similar way to that of Doreen Massey’s definition of these terms, as distinct yet co-implicated arenas of temporality and interrelation (Massey 2005, p. 55). Transience and change are implicit in place-based music scenes, as scenes flow between space and across time. They are, like localities, “the intersection of social activities and social relations and, crucially, activities and relations which are necessarily, by definition, dynamic, changing” (Massey 1994, p. 136). The transience inherent in music scenes shapes our understanding of venue spaces. Scenes reify dynamic processes of sociality that recreate the social experience of live music venues anew night after night within a specific horizon of possibility.

The changing trends in fashion and genre that define local music scenes are further influenced by global developments in international music culture, but are also reified in the concrete actions and processes that make up the live music ecology, all of which are influenced by taste, culture, and changing perceptions of these. Individual taste is implicated in discussions of music scenes, as participants classify their level of engagement and interest through participation. This aligns with Bourdieu’s understanding of taste as a marker of classification:

Taste is a practical mastery of distributions which makes it possible to sense or intuit what is likely (or unlikely) to befall—and therefore to
bepit—an individual occupying a given position in social space… the social agents whom the sociologist classifies are producers not only of classifiable acts but also of acts of classification which are themselves classified. (Bourdieu 1984, p. 466-467)

Participants position themselves in the social space of a music scene through the way that they engage with venue spaces, what venues they choose to visit, and how regularly they visit them. The positioning of participants in the social space of a live music scene is also closely related to each participant’s habitus.

Habitus accounts for both a participants’ position in the spatial setting of the venue, their role in the music scene that the venue’s house, and their movements in and throughout the geographical boundaries that make up a local scene, as well as the social space of the scene itself. This is because “habitus refers frequently to spatial positioning, both in physical settings and in social life more generally… Social space is therefore about both positions in geographic space and in the more abstract arena of social positioning” (Reed-Danahay 2015, p. 81-82). The social space of music scenes is therefore represented in physical space. Music scenes tend to be concentrated in hip, urban neighbourhoods synonymous with niche spaces of cultural production such as small live music venues. Musicians and other participants often live close to these venues and hence their position in social space is aligned in physical space. This socio-spatial positioning is further influenced by their sense of habitus. Therefore, habitus becomes intersectional with space and place in discussions of music scenes, intersecting with physical space to mark out the status of scene participants in social space. This reflects an anti-essentialist notion of identity; space as “the intersections and interactions of concrete social relations and social processes in a situation of co-presence” (Massey 1994, p. 138). This definition of space as intersectional fits with both scene theory, and Bourdieusian notions of capital and habitus. Social and
cultural capital play a significant role in an individual’s positioning in social space, as does the live music event itself, as the everyday nature of small gigs allows for a level of access that appeals to participants rich in these capitals. Therefore, space, habitus, and alternative forms of capital all play significant roles in the articulation of music scenes.

The small gig further differs from ‘the live concert’ in that gigs are of the ‘everyday’. This is due to their ubiquity, their high rate of incidence in cities, and their low operational costs. Large concerts require considerable planning, logistics, expertise, dedicated or highly-adaptive performance spaces equipped with quality audio-visual technology, plenty of staff and a revolving door of professional musicians. The venues that local gigs take place in are often more informal and accessible than large performance spaces (Whiting and Carter 2016), the level of production is generally lower, and the musicians are usually either amateurs, hobbyists, or semi-professionals who hold down day-jobs outside of musical performance (Rogers 2008). The relationship between the musicians and audience also differs, as any clear distinction between the two groups is blurred (Rogers 2012). Therefore, the accessibility and ‘everyday’ nature of small gigs is the key socio-cultural difference between them and larger concert events.

**Live music and everyday life**

Definitions of ‘the everyday’ relate to both time and space. The term refers to those events that take place every day, week, month or year and occur in a local setting that is accessible to those engaging with them regularly (Hesmondhalgh 2002, p. 125). We perceive the everyday as commonplace and perpetual. Everyday events are part of daily life and can be valued as much as they are taken for granted. This makes such events routine and part of the larger process of
‘getting through the day’. The ‘everyday’ is often mundane, as “events that happen every night or every week, even every month and every year, are part of mundane, ordinary living, and might serve to remind us of lived experience ‘beyond’ structures of power” (Hesmondhalgh 2002, p. 126). In the abstract, the local small gig is one of many ordinary experiences that make up everyday engagement with music.

Small gigs are part of the everyday life of music scenes and can be viewed as either novel entertainment for those engaging with them occasionally or a ‘way of life’ for those more entrenched in the scene. Tia DeNora has written extensively on everyday engagement with music, with an emphasis on affect (2000). Building on DeNora, Prior argues that an adequate understanding of music in everyday life “means shifting the level of examination from a general sociology of music to a specific sociology of people doing things with music; from the idea of constraining social structures to the constitutive effects of musical meanings” (Prior 2013, p. 189). As ‘people doing things with music’, small gigs give scenes coherence and the means to construct and maintain collective identities.

Small gigs have often been overlooked in studies of popular music. Local gigs lacked the spectacle of the live concert and were too often bound up with notions of amateurism. However, since the early 1990s local music scenes and the small gigs that populate them have received further attention in scholarly studies of popular music. The impetus for this new research was articulated by David Hesmondhalgh:

…what we need to focus on in providing a more adequate conception of ordinary experiences of music than in existing audience studies is not merely the idea of the everyday, but time and space… there has been too much attention to spectacular and supposedly rebellious uses of popular music, at the expense of the mundane and the banal. (2002, p.127)
This appeal seems to have been largely answered given the numerous publications and research projects on local small live music events published in the following years (Behr et al 2016; Behr, Brennan, and Cloonan 2014; Bennett 2004; Bennett and Peterson 2004; Bennett and Rogers 2016a, 2016b; Cohen 2007; Gallan and Gibson 2013; Gallan 2012; Gibson and Homan 2004; Holt 2014; Rogers 2008). Such research has served to elucidate the importance of small venues and local gigs. These small venues act as performance spaces for emerging artists and musicians while gigs provide an opportunity for audiences to engage with live music on an every-day level.

The impact of space and place on the sustainability of music scenes cannot be understated. Many internationally recognised scenes initially revolved around a handful of venues operating in a specific place (Kronenburg 2012, pp. 4-5). Identifiable musical styles, sounds and genres have found their birthplace in the music scenes of specific cities:

The performance of popular music endows places with special identities that create an international image for their host cities — the US cities of Nashville, Detroit and Seattle are, respectively, synonymous with Country, Motown, and Grunge. Elsewhere in the world, Tamworth is styled the Country Music capital of Australia, Cologne the birthplace of Krautrock (in Germany known as Kosmische Musik, cosmic music), and Ibiza the centre for Dance and House (sometimes known as Balearic Beat). (Kronenburg 2011, p. 139)

The venues of these cities serve as incubators for distinctive musical styles, mixing in the melting pot of each scene and the live music ecology that served to create them. These musical styles are intrinsically tied to place. The small gigs that contributed to their birth are organised and performed by working musicians, each looking for their next opportunity to work a live room. The network of venues and social actors—the live music ecology—facilitates an identifiable music scene that eventually becomes internationally recognised. Without the opportunity for participants to organise, socialise and perform
many of these scenes and their associated musical styles may not have come to fruition. It is evident then that place, space, and everyday engagement with live music is integral to the formation of live music scenes.

As discussed above, place, space, scene, and the live music ecology all inform the production of live music events (Brennan, Cloonan, Behr and Webster 2016), and each serve as the focus of my analysis chapters as they relate to the small venue experience and the diverse ways in which it can be valued. My interest is not in the authenticity of performance as a cultural form or even the music itself. Rather, the focus of this thesis is the activities that form around live music, the scenes and live music ecology, and the generation and mobilisation of non-economic forms of capital that contribute to their sustainability.

Previous literature on live music venues focus on issues of place making, vernacular culture, and collective identity. These studies have often been limited to a specific site, whether a single venue or regional area (Gallan and Gibson 2013; Gallan 2012; Smyly 2010; Cohen 2007, 1991; Finnegan 1989). Venue ethnographies and site-specific studies of live music scenes have influenced my methodology, as outlined in Chapter One. Throughout my data analysis (Chapters Three, Four, and Five) I compare the venues of The Old Bar and The Tote, unpacking the discrete music scenes that they facilitate. However, such small venues have recently come under threat. The next section discusses how culture-led urban regeneration polices of the 2000s have hastened gentrification in Fitzroy and Collingwood, threatening the very ‘night-time economies’ that these strategies rely on for their success.

‘Creative Cities’, Gentrification, and the Night-time Economy
The relatively recent ‘creative cities’ school of socio-economics and urban planning has greatly affected the way in which cultural industries are managed, regulated, and promoted by local governments (Lobato 2006). Coined by Charles Landry (2000), the concept centres on the notion that cities are built on both hard and soft infrastructure. Prominent urban studies theorist Richard Florida expanded on Landry’s ‘creative city’ concept in his book The Rise of the Creative Class (2002), taking Landry’s soft infrastructure and its constituent workforce of highly skilled labour — dubbed ‘the creative class’ — and running with it.

Establishing a link between economic development and concentrations of technology and media workers, artists, musicians and other ‘high bohemians’, Florida asserts that music plays a central role in the creation of identity. It is similar to ‘scene’ in this way. and the formation of communities (2002, p. 228), stating that “one of the last areas of social life where a modicum of authenticity can be found is the music scene” (Florida 2002, p. 187), and that “music is a key part of what makes a place authentic, in effect providing a sound or ‘audio identity’” (Florida 2002, p. 228). Florida also emphasises the appeal of ‘street-level culture’, which clusters along thoroughfares lined with a multitude of small-scale cultural producers, including coffee houses, art galleries, live music venues, and boutique bars (2002, p. 184). He describes these kinds of accessible cultural hotspots as organic, native, and ‘of-the-moment’, with a sizeable number of the creators of said culture living close by, adding weight to the notion of social space. Further, Florida’s street-level culture implicates the idea of a local scene—a network of social relationships built around a specific location that facilitates interaction either by means of work or play — albeit Florida’s use of scene is

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13 Landry defines soft infrastructure as “that system of associations, exchanges and human interactions that supports and encourages the flow of ideas between individuals and institutions” (2008, p.133).
decidedly more neoliberal. In such a scene, creators are participants and vice versa, resulting in a culture of producing and consuming cultural capital. Florida also accounts for the role of social capital in his notion of street-level culture, stating that “[t]o many the social milieu is indeed the street’s main attraction” (2002, p. 185). Small live music venues are fertile grounds for such exchange, as they provide a spatial focus for participants to group themselves around. Florida’s writings and publications position small venues as integral to a city’s live music ecology. However, Florida and other proponents of the ‘creative cities’ model are not without their detractors, and there has been serious criticism regarding his thesis. Government intervention in ‘creative cities’ has largely failed and the model has been criticised for speeding-up the process of gentrification, threatening the very street-level culture that it relies on.

Kate Shaw’s work on the cultural sector criticises creative city strategies as being no more than economic development plans that instrumentalise culture, expediting gentrification and pushing rental rates up, threatening the cultural producers that these strategies rely upon for their success. This creates a paradox: “[t]he particular problem for cities that want economic development and cultural vitality is that one tends to occur at the expense of the other” (2013, p. 340). The common link between “cultural infrastructure” (Gallan and Gibson 2013, p. 174)—such as live music venues—and gentrification, is emphasised, demonstrating how one affects the other.

As a counterpoint to Florida’s ‘street-level culture’ Shaw’s research focuses on ‘cultural clusters’, which emphasises the closely placed operation of ‘indie creative activities’. These are defined as low-cost and low-profit, but of high cultural value:
Independent creative subcultures, in their various hybrids of music, theatre, art, and new and old media, are the primordial soup of cultural evolution. It is within these indie subcultures that the new work begins, often with very low entry thresholds as, unlike other productive activities, participation does not demand much initial skill or experience. (Shaw 2013, p. 333)

The social and cultural benefits of these are significant, as such activities might encourage an individuals’ transition from consumer to producer, or motivate further engagement in the form of more exhibitions, performance opportunities, and live music venues.

Small venues serve as a local live music scene’s equivalent infrastructure for the production of ‘indie creative activities’. They are essential to the vitality of live music scenes, the sustainability of the live music ecology, and the cities that rely on this ecology for their cultural vibrancy. Live music’s role in ‘creative cities’-led cultural policies and the effect these policies have had on local night-time economies is worthy of consideration here (Homan 2011a). The Floridian school of neoliberal socio-economics has had a large impact on Australian cities, with even small towns developing their own ‘creative city’ plans, while the larger capital cities have planned theirs in terms of regional and global competition (Homan 2011a, p. 97). Further, live music is a major asset in ‘creative cities’ strategies, as a city’s ‘liveableness’ is based on consumer access to leisure, entertainment, and ‘street-level culture’, of which live music and music venues form a large part. Live music culture, music venues and government policy are therefore tied closely to concepts of city branding and the marketing of culture (Homan 2011a).

A city’s nightlife is almost always implied in discussions of cultural vibrancy. Festivals, concerts, and other cultural initiatives all rely on the realm of social encounter and play associated with the night-time. However,
“as an object of cultural policy [nightlife] has been strangely marginalised. It seemed that this nightlife was not a legitimate object of attention other than as something to be regulated and contained… In short, a problem” (Lovatt and O’Connor 1995, p. 130). Dominant perceptions of nightlife cast it as a site of transgression, “a time of crime and desire” (Lovatt and O’Connor 1995) and a space for encounter with the ‘other’. Therefore, the night-time economy continues to be viewed as something that must be policed. This is problematic, as it is evident that a city’s nightlife is an integral part of its broader cultural verve; a vibrant time of socialisation that needs to be addressed as such. Recent research has called for government policy on nightlife to shift from the perspective of a problem to be policed, to one of social practice to be protected (Lobato 2006), acknowledging the social dimension of live music. This draws attention to the nature of pubs and clubs as sites of networking, exchange, and the production of a distinct form of cultural capital referred to as ‘tacit city knowledge’ (i.e. the ‘lived and learned’ experience of a city acquired only by being a local (O’Connor, 2004)). Further to this, “[n]ightlife is not only about hedonism; it is also a site for the exchange of ideas, gossip and speculation—the tacit knowledges which underwrite creative cities” (Lobato 2006, p. 72). Therefore, a city’s live music ecology is a particularly valuable and vibrant cultural asset, and one which must be protected, safeguarded, and encouraged accordingly.

One of the key successes of the Save Live Australia’s Music (SLAM) campaign (discussed further in the next chapter) was the Deloitte report into The Economic, Social and Cultural Contribution of Venue-based Live Music in Victoria (2011). The report provides a picture of the financial contribution of live music to the state’s economy. However, as the report focuses primarily on the economic impact of the live music industry on the Victorian
economy, it only addresses its social and cultural contributions in general terms that minimise the nuances of participation and its value. A qualitative discussion of these contributions is included, under the broad topic headings of ‘Culture’, ‘Community’ and ‘Quality of the environment’. The Victorian live music ecology is discussed but an investigation of local music scenes, place-specific dynamics, and social and cultural value is lacking. Nevertheless, as a summary of live music’s economic contribution to the state, the report remains substantial.

In contrast to the Deloitte report, Ernst and Young’s 2011 inquiry into the live music industry is a predominantly quantitative analysis of the sector’s financial impact. Such a large-scale study of purely economic outcomes does not allow for an insight into the human interactions and relationships that make up the live music ecology, nor how they inform socio-cultural processes with long-term effects. It is this underrepresentation of the social, cultural, and human element of the live music ecology that this thesis addresses, specifically how these are informed by small live music venues and their role as social hubs for local music scenes and the grassroots foundation of the live music ecology.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has discussed and defined the key concepts, theories, and literature integral to this thesis. These include: my case study venues, The Old Bar and The Tote; a definition of small live music venues, popular music, and live music as they relate to my case studies; Bourdieusian concepts of capital, habitus, and the field, along with expanded terms such as social space and subcultural capital; music scenes, subcultures, and the live music ecology; the role of place, space, and ‘the everyday’ in these scenes and the ecology; and a discussion of
gentrification, the night-time economy and ‘creative cities’-led cultural policies as they relate to my research topic. Through a review of the existing literature, these concepts and a broader conceptual apparatus has been situated amongst previous publications. This apparatus is drawn upon later to inform the analysis of my data. I return to discussions of music scenes, the live music ecology, and Bourdieusian forms of capital in chapters Three to Five.
Chapter 3 – Place, Space, and Melbourne’s Inner-North

The effect of ‘place’ on music scenes and cultural narratives is significant, as a sense of place influences the identity of a scene. Scenes exist on a level of geography and materiality, and centre themselves around specific places and spaces. These places (suburbs, neighbourhoods, cities etc.) inform the nature of the music being made, informing new styles and genres. Indeed, “[l]ocations where popular musicians have been particularly active, or audiences and subcultures unusually vibrant, have become synonymous (and sometimes eponymous) with specific styles of music” (Connell and Gibson 2003, p. 90). The influence of place on popular music has been widely discussed, centring on themes of identity, style, genre, and diversity. Such work emphasises how place influences the music created and performed therein, as live music scenes are complex systems of interpersonal connection and sociality that maintain a strong sense of localness about them (Strong and Whiting 2018, p. 3).

In this chapter I focus on the role of place as it pertains to live music venues and the local music scene of Melbourne’s inner-north. I discuss the historical settings of Melbourne and its inner-northern suburbs of Fitzroy and Collingwood, analysing how these areas have influenced my case study venues and providing context through a history of these suburbs, the inner-north, and Melbourne in general. Finally, I position my case study venues in
terms of the role of ‘the local pub’ as a meeting place for musicians and live music enthusiasts, and the historical significance of this.

In relation to my research question, social and cultural value are discussed in terms of the roles that small live music venues perform as social hubs for music scenes and as performance sites for emerging acts. Social and cultural value are demonstrated in terms of social and cultural capital, which small venues mobilise in order to generate revenue. As economic capital is sometimes relatively scarce in local music scenes, the value of social and cultural capital becomes a means for producing income. This is one of the ways that small live music venues can be valued; both in terms of their inherent social and cultural value (demonstrated in the following analysis chapters), and in the way in which they convert this value into revenue. This chapter also positions The Old Bar and The Tote in the socio-historical context of Melbourne’s inner-north, setting each up for a discussion of the live music ecology and their status within it in Chapter Four. However, before continuing with a discussion and analysis of ‘place’ we must first distinguish between ‘place’ and ‘space’ as distinct concepts.

Space and Place

‘Space’, as I define it here, relates to music venues, performance spaces, and other sites of music-making activity (e.g. recording and rehearsal studios) that are inherently related to musical practices. This definition frames space as “a simultaneity of stories-so-far” (Massey 2005, p. 130), the collective value of which is cumulative and corresponds with the social and cultural significance of the activities that have occurred therein. ‘Place’ is broader and emphasizes geographic locations such as cities—Melbourne being the case study here—or distinct urban areas such as Melbourne’s inner-north, where most of the
city’s live music venues are located and where I centre my analysis. Although I will discuss ‘place’ in this chapter, analysing its role in establishing a context for my case study venues, I have decided to reserve an analysis of ‘space’ as a distinct concept for my discussion of the venues themselves, which I investigate in my chapter on the live music ecology (Chapter Four). This is because the materiality of venue spaces serves as a cornerstone of the live music ecology (Behr et al 2016, p. 19), and should therefore be discussed in a separate context to that of ‘place’, which is defined here “not as points or areas on maps, but as integrations of space and time; as spatio-temporal events” (Massey 2005, p. 130). In line with this definition, my research presents a snapshot—a ‘moment’—in the musical life of two specific spaces—The Old Bar and The Tote—within a defined geographical place; Melbourne’s inner-north. Further, although places are collections of stories, they are also made up of disconnections and the relations not established (Massey 2005, p. 130); exclusions, a factor that is ever apparent in place-based live music scenes and one which I explore throughout my analysis.

Due to the guarded nature of niche spaces of cultural production, placed-based live music scenes are inherently exclusive yet also function as sanctuaries for artists, musicians, and other cultural producers.¹ Although music scenes ‘divide up’ place into defined fields of cultural production and consumption, this provides a sense of belonging and collective identity to those who might otherwise feel excluded from mainstream nightlife (Gallan and Gibson 2013; Lobato 2006). The paradox of place-based music scenes is demonstrated in their ability to include some at the cost of excluding others.

¹ This dilemma is reflected in broader discussions of place, as “[h]orror at local exclusivities sits uneasily against support for the vulnerable struggling to defend their patch” (Massey 2005, p. 6).
Chapter 3 - Place

Place is also often used to describe a delineated area of practice. This definition of place is one of meaning making, identity forming, and everyday practice, as “the idea that a deterministic relationship between place and culture exists—as musical styles and sounds emerge from different locations, and as musicians relate to their environment—remains powerful” (Connell and Gibson 2003, pp. 90-91). This intersection of the social, geographical, and political resonates with Bourdieu’s notion of social space, which can also be framed in terms of popular music’s relationship with place and broader discussions of ‘place making’. We can therefore think of local music scenes as limited not only by geographical borders, but also social ones too.

Melbourne

Melbourne is often referred to as the ‘Live Music Capital of the World’ (Newton and Coyle-Hayward 2018). This label, albeit self-appointed, reflects a self-conscious preoccupation with framing culture as representative of the city. Further to this, live music has become key in city branding strategies around the world (Shank 1994; Cohen 1991). Following the early-2000s, which saw the popularity of ‘creative city’-driven economic growth models (Bianchini 1995; Florida 2002; Landry 2008; Montgomery 2004), Melbourne has subscribed whole-heartedly to its assumed title of Australia’s ‘cultural capital’ (Homan 2014), with various tourism and media campaigns making statements to this effect. This title is not without its significance, as the relative success of the Save Live Australia’s Music (SLAM) campaign and the continued advocacy for live music in the city have demonstrated (Homan 2014). However, the paradox of culture-led urban renewal strategies and the ‘creative cities’ model (Florida 2002; Landry 2008, 2000)—their reliance on culture to assist property development that eventually leads to gentrification,
in turn threatening and diminishing that same culture—has raised a variety of problems for practitioners, local governments, and the small venues that populate Melbourne.

In 2010, the closure of the much-loved Tote Hotel provoked the SLAM campaign. The Tote closed as a result of new and severe liquor licensing laws that deemed music venues ‘high risk’ (Homan 2011b), and subsequently required all live music venues to hire security guards at a ratio of two for the first 100 patrons with one extra guard for every further 100 patrons, in addition to the installation of CCTV cameras (Homan 2010). Instigated as a lobbyist movement, SLAM coordinated a 20,000-strong rally in Melbourne’s CBD in protest of the liquor licensing laws that had caused The Tote’s closure (Homan 2014, p. 152). This remains the largest cultural protest in Australian history (Walker 2012, p. 4).

Since 2010, the status of live music and the reform of live music policy has remained a topic of popular public debate and concern. SLAM was successful in reversing the damaging effects of the licensing laws that had threatened The Tote and has remained active in local music scenes, particularly in Melbourne (Homan 2014). Another outcome of SLAM was the establishment of Music Victoria (Watson and Forrest 2012): an independent, not-for-profit organization that represents the contemporary music industry in the state of Victoria, run by former journalist and live music activist Patrick Donovan (Homan 2014, p. 152). Such victories have strengthened the formal processes that protect live music venues and have kept the debate around the cultural and social value of live music alive.

The events that led to the closing of The Tote, along with the advocacy that arose as a reaction to this, are indicative of the way that live music ecologies are effected and influenced by agents and factors operating outside
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of music scenes. Whereas scenes encompass artists, audiences and other participants engaging and interacting in certain delineated fields of practice, the live music ecology takes into account those influences that come from outside of the scene. Although not reported on extensively throughout this thesis—as they have already been covered comprehensively in previous scholarship (Homan 2016, 2011a, 2011b; Walker 2012)—the events discussed above are telling in terms of how live music research might benefit from understandings of both scene(s) and the live music ecology as mutually complementary theoretical frameworks.

The Inner-North

In the context of this thesis ‘place’ refers to the lived environment of a delineated geographic locale and the experiences and encounters accessible therein. Various social and cultural forces may affect this lived environment. Gentrification², for example, has had a considerable impact on place-based live music scenes across Australia and the world, and is no longer just limited to the West³ (Atkinson and Bridge 2005, p. 1). However, such scenes are usually also a precursor to gentrification (Lobato 2006; Shaw 2005).

The cultural narrative of Melbourne’s inner-north is well established in popular local discourse. The media, policymakers, and scene participants

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2 Gentrification’ was coined by Ruth Glass in 1964 to describe the ongoing colonisation of London’s working class quarters by the cities middle classes (Atkinson and Bridge 2005, p. 4). It refers in particular to housing and the renovation of modest, smaller residences located in previously dilapidated neighbourhoods. These houses were upgraded to appeal to the gentry and subdivided for profit, with an inflated price-tag to match. Furthermore, “[o]nce this process of ‘gentrification’ starts in a district, it goes on rapidly until all or most of the original working class occupiers are displaced, and the whole social character of the district is changed” (Glass 1964, p. xix).

3 Following the second World War, gentrification has swept the globe, beginning in the Western metropolises of London and New York and expanding to include the colonies of the former Europe- an empires and much of the global south (Atkinson and Bridge 2005). The shift to a post-industrial economy in the West has further hastened the speed of gentrification’s third wave. This has greatly affected the cost of living for musicians and creatives in Melbourne’s inner-north.
themselves have constructed a narrative around the suburbs of Fitzroy and Collingwood (see Figure 2), one typified by street art, boutique cafes, green spaces such as Edinburgh Gardens in Fitzroy North and Victoria Park in Collingwood (home to the Renegade Pub Football League⁴ and the Reclink Community Cup⁵), pub culture, and live music. Both Collingwood and Fitzroy are former industrial areas that were transformed into cultural hubs by artists and musicians in the late 1970s. These ‘creatives’ took over the former factories and worker’s cottages, attracted by their cheap rental rates and open-plan living spaces, which were desirable as potential studios and rehearsal rooms. This identity and the history of the area is known to local music scene participants, as former manager of The Tote and Old Bar staff member Therese Martschinke observed:

Collingwood and Fitzroy were rough areas back in the day. So rents would have been really cheap so artists and musicians would live here... And so then starts a little hub and people hear about that hub and want to be a part of it and then come over and then it just grows and grows. (interview)

This narrative reflects historical accounts of the area as well as artist occupations of post-industrial suburbs in Melbourne and abroad (Shaw 2005). However, such occupations have often been harbingers of gentrification, and a clear line can be drawn between the ‘creative class’ (Florida 2002) and the early stages of gentrification.

Since the 1970s, Melbourne’s inner-north has been a refuge for artists and musicians looking for a sense of place. Many of their artistic practices have centred around particular cultural institutions; niche spaces of cultural production that rely on cheap rental space and low overheads to operate

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⁴ The Renegade Pub Football League is a social Australian Rules football league encompassing a number of the live music venues and pubs of Melbourne’s inner-north (including The Old Bar and The Tote), each of which have their own dedicated teams. The Old Bar Unicorns and The Toters are two of the oldest teams in the league.
⁵ The Reclink Community Cup is an annual charity Australian Rules football match between teams comprised of local community radio workers—The Megahertz—and musicians—The Rockdogs.
sustainably (O’Hanlon and Sharpe 2009, pp. 293-295). The diversity of venues and entertainment spaces established throughout Fitzroy and Collingwood in the late 1970s was part of a cultural boom taking place across Melbourne’s inner-north that continued into the late-twentieth century.

The changing face of Melbourne’s inner-north bears resemblances to other post-industrial cities around the world. London and New York have both been through similar phases of transition, transformation, and renewal, followed by periods of increasing gentrification (Dingle and O’Hanlon 2009, p. 67). Likewise, “[s]ince the 1970s, Fitzroy’s social profile had changed, and its housing stock, once reviled as ‘slums’, had become highly sought after and increasingly expensive” (Dingle and O’Hanlon 2009, p. 63).

Dingle and O’Hanlon cite the availability of cheap rentals as a primary incentive for emerging cultural and artistic institutions in Melbourne’s inner-north. These replaced former manufacturing sites, marking the early stages of gentrification in the area:

In Victoria Street, Fitzroy… the collapse of grocers Moran and Cato and footwear manufacturers Easywear Shoes provided space to a community radio station, a theatre workshop, an independent television production house, and alternative medicine training institutes. (Dingle and O’Hanlon 2009, p. 66)

The ‘alternative’ cultural institutions listed above were founded at the beginning of a long period of hospitality, arts, and ‘wellbeing’ centres (e.g. yoga studios, gyms, massage parlours, osteopaths etc.) colonising the inner-north in an ongoing process of gentrification. This process began with the replacement of the area’s working-class by artists and students, and is now in its late stages with the increasing occupation of the area by Melbourne’s professional class.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s Fitzroy and Collingwood became closely identified with Melbourne’s live music scene. Iconic venues such as
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The Punters Club, The Evelyn, and The Rob Roy Hotel on Brunswick Street along with The Birmingham and The Tote hotels in Collingwood hosted many mainstays of Australian alternative rock during this time. This was all part of a three-decade wave of gentrification transforming the inner-north, beginning in Carlton during the glam-rock era of the 1970s. Discussing the impact of local culture on identity, O’Hanlon states that “Melbourne’s high streets and their surrounding neighbourhoods are celebrated in film, literature and song. In the 1974 song ‘Carlton’, the band Skyhooks capture the night-time vibe of what was then Melbourne’s most happening address” (2010, pp. 108). This ‘vibe’ eventually moved east, sweeping from Lygon Street in Carlton, through Fitzroy and Collingwood:

By the mid-80s Brunswick Street had overtaken Lygon Street as the heart of alternative Melbourne... Then it was Brunswick Street’s turn to become too expensive and overrun by cafes and restaurants. So in the early 90s the inner north’s scene moved on to Smith Street, which until then had been an eclectic mix of derelict old department stores, a Coles New World supermarket (that was stuck in the 60s), and a number of Greek cafes, Vietnamese restaurants and bakeries—as well as two-dollar and opportunity shops... But, like Lygon and Brunswick Streets before it, Smith Street’s popularity is making it increasingly expensive. (O’Hanlon 2010, pp. 111-113)

As the ‘alternative Melbourne’ of the inner-north articulated itself across these suburbs, venues came and went, as did the bands that frequented them. The small venues of Fitzroy and Collingwood were formative spaces for Melbourne’s local music scene in the years following the iconic pub-rock era of the 1970s and 1980s. In addition to this, the boom of 1990s alternative rock also coincided with a property boom that has continued to shape the inner-north to this day.

Following this bohemian phase of Melbourne’s inner-north, which saw live music venues take the place of the restaurants and corner pubs previously frequented by the area’s working class, gyms and cafes have
sprung up in the disused warehouses and commercial spaces that once housed shoe factories and other textile manufacturing plants. Such changes are symptomatic of late-stage gentrification as young professionals begin to move into the area. This new demographic have either prioritised lifestyle above the ability to purchase real estate or are wealthy enough to buy into the inflated Melbourne property market (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2018), changing the social character of the area yet again.

The suburbs of Fitzroy and Collingwood are located north-east of Melbourne’s city centre and are two of the oldest suburbs in the greater Melbourne area. Both are trendy urban districts catering for nightlife, dining, and live music. Many small live music venues populate the area surrounding Brunswick Street and Smith Street—the high streets of Fitzroy and Collingwood respectively—along with the main streets and highways that connect the two suburbs. These high streets are symbolic of each area’s demographic and their associated ‘street-level’ culture.

Unlike other Australian cities, Melbourne has retained its high street shopping strips despite increasing gentrification (O’Hanlon 2010, p. 109). Entertainment and nightlife have been central to the survival of these high streets, and have heavily influenced their character and the aesthetic of the surrounding suburbs. These “suburbs are known by name, but also by their major streets’ style and ethnicity: Carlton evokes Lygon Street’s Italian cafes; Fitzroy, Brunswick Street’s alternative grunge scene; St Kilda, bars and entertainment in Fitzroy Street and European cake shops in Acland Street” (O’Hanlon 2010, p. 108). The ‘alternative grunge scene’ of Fitzroy has clear links to live music, as the concentration of venues contribute to the suburb’s sense of place, identity, and cultural value.
Fitzroy

The rise of cultural institutions in Fitzroy during the late 1970s and 1980s brought artists and musicians to the area. These ‘creatives’ patronised the suburb’s corner pubs, bars and cafes, with many of them moving into the cheap worker’s cottages nearby. The 1990s brought a boom in residential development following the recession, which saw the area transition from small businesses, artist studios, retailers and manufacturers, into a hub for nightlife, hospitality, and leisure activities (see O’Hanlon 2010; O’Hanlon and Sharpe 2009; Dingle and O’Hanlon 2009). The 1990s was also a big decade for musical life in Fitzroy, as The Evelyn and The Punter’s Club cemented their reputations as prominent venues. However, gentrification has had a disruptive effect on Fitzroy’s potential as a hub for Melbourne’s music scene, as few young musicians can now afford to live there (Dingle and O’Hanlon 2009, p. 66).

Recently, Fitzroy has become an expensive suburb to rent and buy property. As the Australian housing market has little restrictions on valuation, prices have skyrocketed in the years following the residential boom of the 1990s (Wood and Dovey 2015). This has become particularly apparent in recent years, with the median sale price of a house in Fitzroy rising from AUD $945,000 in 2014 to AUD $1,465,729 in 2016 (ABS 2018), an increase of 50% in just two years.

Since the early 2000s Fitzroy has experienced a great deal of gentrification, with disputes over noise pollution between new residents and established venues coming to a head. Indeed, “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” (Gibson and Homan 2004, as cited in Smyly 2010, p. 84). The Fitzroy music scene in
particular has suffered a slew of blows to its live music ecology, seen in the closing of many long-standing local venues along with continued pressure on existing venues to ‘turn it down’ (Shaw 2009, p. 195). Live music venues in Fitzroy have been pushed out or forced to change their production practices in the wake of gentrification and its effects on the local urban environment. Adapting to these pressures is costly and many venues have struggled to meet the new standards imposed on them, as their budgets are tight and live music is not a lucrative business (Shaw 2013). A pertinent case study is Fitzroy’s Rainbow Hotel, which suffered financial woes due to an ongoing dispute with neighbours over noise complaints:

The publican of the heritage-protected Rainbow Hotel, a roots music pub in Fitzroy, says he was forced to spend AUD $80,000 in sound-proofing (and fines and legal fees) to satisfy his new neighbours whose own levels of insulation were inadequate. (Shaw 2009, pp. 195-196)

Although it has continued to host live music—albeit largely acoustic performances—the case of the Rainbow is exemplary, demonstrating the damaging effect gentrification has had on Fitzroy’s live music ecology and local music scene.

Despite this adversity, The Old Bar has remained steadfast in its resolve to host live music seven nights a week in the heart of Fitzroy. However, its owners are aware of their precarious situation. Venue booking agent Joel Morrison stated that “noise complaints were a big threat to live music venues” and that “[j]ust from one person complaining it can cause a hell of a lot of trouble for you, the council can really clamp down on you” (Dowling 2012). Co-owner Liam Matthews stated that “[i]f you start waiting for noise complaints to roll in you are already too late. We try to stop as much noise as possible before people are put out. Within reason of course, people must also understand the area they are moving into and accept us to
some degree” (Yarra City Arts 2015). Here Matthews cites an active approach to dealing with noise complaints and other potential disputes. This approach has served The Old Bar well and the venue continues to host music at all volumes throughout the week.

The definitive sense of a local music scene is apparent in live music participation and small venues across Fitzroy and Collingwood. However, many of my interview participants who perform in these venues discussed their struggle to gain an audience outside of the inner-north:

    We can play in Brunswick6 and no one comes to see us but then we play in Fitzroy and we sell it out. There’s definitely Fitzroy/Collingwood bands and Northside [i.e. Brunswick] bands.

(Marty Baker, interview)

Here Marty Baker, former Batpiss7 drummer (see Figure 8) and manager of The Tote, reflects on his bands’ popularity in a specific geographic area and local scene: Fitzroy and Collingwood. One inference that can be drawn from this is that Batpiss are only popular at certain inner-northern Melbourne venues, such as The Old Bar and The Tote; that without these venues and the local scene the band has less traction with audiences.

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6 Brunswick is a suburb of Melbourne further to the north-west of Fitzroy.
7 Batpiss are a punk three-piece made up of regular patrons and former staff of The Tote.
Figure 8 – Batpiss (l-r: Paul Pirie, Marty Baker, Thomy Slone)
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The role of ‘place’ and its impact on social space is worthy of consideration here. For example, Batpiss and its members ostensibly hold more cultural and social capital in the music scene of Melbourne’s inner-north than anywhere else. As a band, their social and cultural capital is therefore limited by their habitus and status in this music scene, and is not easily converted outside of this social space (Marty Baker, interview). However, a certain amount of social and cultural capital is demonstrated when bands who are identified with a specific venue perform at said venue. This was the case when Batpiss headlined two consecutive nights at The Tote for their album launch on August 25 and 26 2017, emphasising the link between the band, the venue, and its associated scene, centred just east of Fitzroy in the post-industrial suburb of Collingwood.

Collingwood

Collingwood’s history tells a slightly different story to that of Fitzroy. Although the two suburbs are situated alongside one another, Collingwood has taken longer to gentrify, as local venue-owners have made strong steps to combat development. It is only recently that the suburb has started to see the effects of gentrification changing its landscape and increasing rental prices in the area (O’Hanlon 2010, pp. 94-95).

Built on a swamp, Collingwood was a slum for most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Demographic data from the early 1970s shows that manufacturing workers were heavily concentrated in the City of Collingwood at the time, making up 47.5 per cent of the municipal population (Dingle and O’Hanlon 2009, p. 54). However, this changed rapidly over the following 30 years:
In Yarra, which is based on the old cities of Fitzroy, Collingwood, and Richmond, manufacturing workers [now] accounted for 9.6 per cent or only 3,451 people. Managers, professionals, and similar groups had become the dominant group in the inner city by 2001, comprising almost 45 per cent of the workforce… (Dingle and O’Hanlon 2009, p. 54)

By 2001, the inner-north had become dominated by white collar workers, a big change from the area’s working-class roots three decades previous.

Collingwood’s changing demographics have had a lot to do with the area’s post-industrial transition to a lifestyle economy. However, the suburb’s aesthetic appeal is still built on an image of dilapidated housing estates, converted former factories, and the grunge-chic of venues such as The Tote, The Bendigo, The Grace Darling, and Yah Yah’s. Venues such as these and the local live music scene associated with them have attracted a number of musicians to Collingwood from regional areas across Australia.

Thomy Sloane of Batpiss (see Figure 8) moved from Goulburn in rural New South Wales, finding a scene in Collingwood centred around The Tote Hotel:

I feel comfortable in this scene, I don’t really look at it as if it’s a scene, it’s just where I’m happy to live/work. I want to play music, I want to see music. I want to be around people that are into the same shit. I’m happy in Collingwood, I’ve never really lived anywhere where I felt like this is where I want to be… I’m from a country town and I’ve lived in other towns as well that I’ve hated, I wasn’t happy at all, and even in Melbourne, like when I lived in Thornbury, it was depressing, I hated it, fucken hated it; and then when I moved to Collingwood I was just like, “Fuck, this is awesome. This is Melbourne.” Every fucken night of the week there’s something on. (Thomy Sloane, interview)

The urban environment of Collingwood is juxtaposed here against country towns and suburban Thornbury, which Sloane frames as ‘depressing’. Like Sloane, many of my interviewees emphasised a feeling of belonging in the suburb. His understanding of Collingwood is that of an authentic urban

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8 Thornbury is an outer Melbourne suburb, further north of Collingwood.
experience, stating “This is Melbourne” in reference to the suburb’s aesthetic. It is interesting that the built environment of the area—it’s sense of ‘place’—is aligned closely with the ‘scene’, as though each influences the other.

This is ‘social space’ and is demonstrated further in the music video for ‘Collingwood’, a song by local heavy metal band High Tension9 (2013). The song and video references several Collingwood landmarks, which depicts the suburb as a caricature of itself. The lyrics read:

Took my last 20 outta the ATM
Took apiss in a tinnie10, left it there in the corner! Took my pot11 outta the pub, got myself a traveler12 Took the 8613 and didn’t pay
Living the life, living the dream, oh yeah! Collingwood! Collingwood
Spent the night like it was my last
Spewed in a cup, spat on the streets
High fived every cunt on Smith Street
Living the life, living the dream, oh yeah! Collingwood! Collingwood

(‘Collingwood’ lyrics, High Tension)

This is an insider’s account of a particularly raucous night out in Collingwood, sung in a vernacular that is adjacent to the suburb’s punk-rock appeal, and reflects the local music scene and its over-the-top attitude, parodying it slightly. The song’s video—which was directed and animated by the band’s bassist Matt Weston and drawn by Sarah ‘Thomo’ Thompson of local band Camp Cope

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9 High Tension are a prominent local metal band featuring members of a number of other Melbourne rock and punk bands.
10 A ‘tinnie’ is a can of beer.
11 A ‘pot’ is a small glass of beer (285mL).
12 A ‘traveller’ is Australian slang for a beer that is consumed while commuting.
13 ‘The 86’ is the local tram (streetcar) route that travels along Smith Street, Collingwood’s main high street.
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(discussed in detail in Chapter Five)—features various Collingwood music personalities and landmarks, crudely depicted using animated characters drawn in MS Paint. The aesthetic of the video itself reflects the seedy ‘sticky carpet’ vibe of Collingwood’s music venues, and the strong theme of amateurism inherent in its production is aligned with punk-rock aesthetics more broadly.

The animated members of High Tension (see Figure 9) are shown performing in and around Collingwood and the video features many landmarks of the suburb, such as the 86 tram that travels along Smith Street, The Tote Hotel, The Peel Hotel (a popular local gay club), members of the Collingwood Magpies (the local AFL team), infamous criminal, comedian, and serial killer Mark ‘Chopper’ Read (who lived in the area for most of his life out of jail), as well as members of local bands closely associated with The Tote and its music scene, such as Batpiss and The Nation Blue14, all of whom are surrounded with ubiquitous Melbourne Bitter cans.

The clip represents an insider’s perspective of Collingwood, one closely associated with its music scene and venue culture. Although it is largely a parody, a lot can be inferred from the video’s representation of the suburb, specifically how those involved with the scene see the area and themselves. This insider knowledge of the Collingwood music scene was implicit in my interview with Sarah Thompson, who drew the video:

You can walk along the street and people will say “Hello”. You might not know them very well, but you know them because you’ve seen them at a bunch of shows. You could know their name and you’ll probably end up being friends with them in a couple of years’ time but it seems like that everyone’s quite social and friendly. If you see a person once every two weeks you know their face, it’s like “Hey mate, how are you?” “Yeah good.” “Who’s that?” “I don’t know. Some guy from The Tote.” It’s pretty funny. Cruising the streets of Collingwood. (Sarah Thompson, interview)

14 The Nation Blue are a long-standing Melbourne via Hobart punk band that have been active in the local music scene for over 20 years.
Figure 9 – High Tension (still from the animated video clip for ‘Collingwood’)

Chapter 3 - Place
Here Thompson makes specific reference to the kind of social and cultural capital gained through regular engagement with the live music scene of Melbourne’s inner-north and its local venues. These venues therefore serve as ideal case studies for further analysis.

My case study venues—The Old Bar and The Tote—are located away from Fitzroy and Collingwood’s high streets of Brunswick Street and Smith Street (see Figure 2). However, they both benefit from being close to these retail and hospitality strips. Johnston Street, which they both share, runs perpendicular to Brunswick and Smith, joining the two suburbs. A number of retail outlets, liquor stores, cafes, restaurants, and pubs are located on Johnston Street, between Fitzroy and Collingwood. However, this section of Fitzroy is primarily seen as a thoroughfare between Fitzroy and Collingwood, rather than its own cultural precinct. The Old Bar is located on the Fitzroy side of Johnston Street, between Brunswick Street and Nicholson Street, the western border between Fitzroy and neighbouring Carlton.

The Old Bar

The Old Bar is a dedicated small live music venue and occupies a unique position in Melbourne’s inner-north, its local scene, and the city’s live music ecology. In hosting original live music every night of the week, the venue and its owners demonstrate a commitment to providing local and emerging acts with valuable performance opportunities. The small-size of the venue (200 capacity) makes The Old Bar an ideal performance space for entry-level bands. The bar is also a dedicated late-night venue, with a liquor license that allows it to remain open until 3am. Following a night’s performance,
audience members and musicians stay late and socialise while the venue serves as an after-party destination for other scene participants.

Joel Morrison discussed the Old Bar’s prioritisation of live music and the importance of ensuring a positive experience for musicians:

> It’s a good breeding ground. It’s very welcoming to bands... We don’t do food, we don’t do anything else apart from the bands, that’s the main focus and it’s reflected well with the attitude of the staff and the patrons and the bands as well. (Joel Morrison, interview)

Many of the staff are musicians themselves. This adds to an understanding of the venue as a specific cultural field in the broader live music ecology of Melbourne, fostering feelings of commonality between the musicians, the audience, and those that serve them, and heightening a sense of place.

Morrison discussed the benefits of hiring musicians as bar staff:

> If we hire a muso that we know and bands that we know, it’s good because they have an understanding of the bar culture and the music scene—the live music venue culture—already, so they know what to expect and how to deal with things and have an understanding of it. (Joel Morrison, interview)

This ‘understanding’ is cultural capital, operationalised via each participant’s habitus and the tacit knowledge that comes only with immersion. Cultural capital and habitus influence the practices of musicians, affecting the styles they engage with and influencing their social networks and the social capital gained from this. As Morrison stated, “[i]t’s a breeding ground. A lot of bands start at bars. Musicians like to see other musicians play. All that sort of stuff, so if you’re in the scene, then why not work in the scene as well?” (interview). These factors contribute to The Old Bar’s reputation as a destination venue for those involved in the local music scene of Melbourne’s inner-north, aligning The Old Bar with a broader narrative of live music culture. However, this culture is often disrupted by social actors that aren’t active participants yet still have an impact on the space.
Speaking from my experience as a staff member at The Old Bar as well as my interview data, a marked change in the clientele occurs between the hours of 1 and 3am on Friday and Saturday nights. As neighbouring bars, clubs, and pubs close at 1am, their patrons seek drinking spaces that remain open later. The Old Bar—with its 3am licence—is an attractive option. Therefore, the venue is positioned as not only a small venue in Melbourne’s live music ecology—offering a platform for emerging acts—but also as a space where participants meet after hours to socialise and ‘compare notes’ regarding their respective nights out. However, 1am is also the time at which live performances at the Old Bar cease and therefore a certain portion of the crowd departs, allowing for a new clientele of late-night revellers to fill the space.

This mixing of clientele often causes tension, as patrons who are unfamiliar with the bar and lack the habitus appropriate for such a field pour into the venue, mixing with participants and putting extra pressure on the bar and security staff. As The Old Bar identifies strongly with the live music scene of Melbourne’s inner-north, many patrons and staff see these new patrons as intruders in ‘their space’. This can lead to a disconnect between the venue’s regular clientele and those less familiar with the space, evoking an idea of the field as guarded, as well as themes of belonging, exclusion, and access to live music scenes as a social issue (Whiting and Carter 2016). This curation of clientele and the exclusion of non-scene participants is even more apparent during the Hispanic Fiesta, a street-long festival that occurs once-a-year and occupies Johnston Street between Nicholson and Brunswick Streets.

The Hispanic Fiesta is an annual street festival bringing in tourists from all over Melbourne and abroad for one weekend in November. During this
time The Old Bar becomes a temporary drinking space for those revellers who may have never visited the venue before, disrupting the space in a manner that the regular clientele, staff and owners find to be a necessary evil. This is because the Hispanic Fiesta is one of the bar’s biggest financial weekends and is integral to the bar’s long-term profitability. These are the same types of disparate social actors described earlier; those that are not part of an identifiable local scene but still influence the ongoing sustainability of Melbourne’s live music culture. Regardless, The Hispanic Fiesta is considered a bane for staff, as the disparity between these ‘scene tourists’ and the cultural field of The Old Bar manifests in a palpable sense of tension.

The begrudging tolerance of the Hispanic Fiesta by The Old Bar’s staff and owners is indicative of the venue’s status as a small business that caters to a niche local music scene. This was reflected in my interview with Joel Morrison, who specifically emphasised that music is their focus despite alcohol being their main source of profit:

I’d say the main focus would be the music. We get all the money from the alcohol, but the music was the main sort of factor for it… So things like putting the door up front. When we first started they used to have the door up halfway through the venue, so you could sit in the front bar and not pay for the bands or anything like that. So we wanted to get the bands as much money as possible while not making us bankrupt. (Joel Morrison, interview)

By prioritising the musicians’ needs on top of their own financial gain, Morrison aligns The Old Bar with the Bourdieusian notion of ‘disinterest’.

15 This was reflected in a joke told onstage by former bartender and Gold Class bassist Jon Shub, who sarcastically remarked that the three band members who had previously worked at The Old Bar were “Happy to volunteer to work Spanish Fest this year” (fieldwork note). The joke was made more significant by the fact that Gold Class were returning to perform The Old Bar’s ten-year anniversary celebrations, having met and formed while working there years earlier, and have since gone on to tour internationally and release two successful full-length albums.

16 Disinterest can be observed in the “symbolic practices [that] deflect attention from the interested character of practices and thereby contribute to their enactment as disinterested pursuits… Individuals and groups who are
prominent in artistic fields; the so-called “economic world reversed” (see Bourdieu, 1993). ‘Disinterest’ is common amongst businesses working in independent music scenes, “where the rewards of the field are credibility and authenticity rather than financial gain” (Threadgold 2015, p. 58). By deprioritising economic capital, Morrison and The Old Bar are awarded with credibility and authenticity in the field of the Melbourne music scene (Threadgold 2015, p. 57). However, this credibility and authenticity is also what the owners rely upon to bring revenue into the venue.

The Old Bar is ideal as a case study for small venues with a capacity of under 200 people. The venue officially caps the amount of patrons allowed into the venue at any one time at 180, which is counted by both the door staff and security guards. The average number of paying live music attendees—those that pay entry at the door—varies from 20 to 30 per night between Sundays and Thursdays. These nights usually feature emerging bands that are yet to establish a strong local following. On the peak nights of Fridays and Saturdays, patronage averages at around 100 people. These nights are usually reserved for more momentous live music events, such as album launches, touring bands, headline acts, and special themed nights.

The Old Bar spends around $85,000 (AUD) per annum on rent and around $3000 on artist fees, with staff costs (including the 3 owners, 12 casual bar staff, 4 casual security guards, 1 door person, and 6 casual sound engineers) reaching around $15,000 per week. This adds up to a total cost of approximately $868,000 per annum. Earnings on Fridays and Saturdays are roughly placed at around $8,000 per night and $3,200 per night from Sunday to Thursday, which comes to a net total of $1,664,000 earnings per annum. However, mark-up on products is approximately 80%, so that would leave

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able to benefit from the transformation of self-interest into disinterest obtain what Bourdieu calls a ‘symbolic capital’” (Swartz 1996, p. 77).
overall gross earnings at around $1,331,200. This puts overall profit after basic costs at $463,200 in a good year. However, there are a large number of other variables and costs that are hidden in the administration and running of a venue, such as license fees, utilities, insurance, maintenance, slow periods, and other hiccups that are difficult to plan for. According to the owners of The Old Bar their actual profit for the 2017/2018 financial year was AUD $18,000. This sort of low profit makes the day-to-day running of a small live music venue a precarious operation.

Although many participants are unaware of the financial risks of running a venue, some see it as a point of respect, as it aligns with their understandings and beliefs regarding independent music scenes, specifically that of disinterest (Bourdieu 1993). As local music industry professional and publicist Bek Duke stated:

They are dedicated live music venues so they’re not just a pub that puts on a band as a bit of a novelty. They exist and their managers and owners exist to support live music and that’s something that’s incredibly important to me so anyone that is willing to put their business out there to support live independent music is going to get my dollar… because there’s not a lot of money in running a live music venue… They could quite as easily just have a DJ or background music, put in more drinking spaces and probably make a bit more money but the fact that they’re willing to have live entertainment and obviously genuinely care about it—they’re the kind of people that I want to go and hang out with. (interview)

Duke demonstrates an emotional investment in the cultural capital that comes with the risk of running a small venue and the associated symbolic value of disinterest in economic capital.

A former manager at The Old Bar’s sister venue The Public Bar, Jarrod Brown maintains an outsiders’ perspective. A native of the nearby city of Geelong and the distinct music scene of that city—having worked at iconic venue The National for many years—his position is less entrenched than
other participants in the Melbourne music scene. However, Brown affirms the notion that The Old Bar’s owners—namely booking agent Joel Morrison—have intentionally curated it as a social space:

You’ll see the same heads there and I think they’re people that Joel’s really worked hard to get a relationship going [with]. Then you’ve got people that are maybe a bit more aligned with Liam [Matthews, owner] and Singajaya [Unlayati, owner], people that are there because they like those guys or used to work for them or whatever, a bit older... (Jarrod Brown, interview)

The music scene of The Old Bar is framed as being somewhat fragmented yet largely aligned with the vision of the owner’s as a space that fosters a sense of familiarity and comfort amongst its patrons, aligned with a distinct sense of habitus. This is founded upon the owner’s physical presence in the bar, developing and maintaining a feeling of consistency throughout the venue space, and generating and mobilising social and cultural capital for its conversion into economic capital. In this sense, the collective social capital of a venue space relates to the total amount of relevant connections and social networks maintained by the venue’s staff, owners, and most importantly, their booking agents. However, this social capital is ephemeral and changes depending on context and circumstance. Therefore, it is not necessarily helpful to think of social or cultural capital as total, quantifiable values, but rather as individual powers that can be mobilized and leveraged from situation to situation. Further, social and cultural capital go some way to imbuing each venue space with a certain amount of symbolic capital, which relates to ideas of merit, prestige, reputation, and status. In regards to my case studies, consistency and a sense of ‘unchanging familiarity’ are fundamental to the idea of ‘the local pub’. Joel Morrison and the owners of The Old Bar have encouraged this sense of consistency by remaining present and visible in the physical setting of the venue, putting themselves on both
sides of the bar, and reinforcing the implicit culture of participation through this.

As a small live music venue hosting original music seven nights a week, The Old Bar’s role in the live music ecology of Melbourne’s inner-north is established and has been so for the last 15 years. Consistency is key and The Old Bar’s owners have maintained a steady aesthetic throughout their tenancy. This has resulted in a great deal of loyalty in their patrons, including Andre Fazio—a former bartender at The Tote, regular sound engineer at The Old Bar, and practicing musician:

I think the social element definitely has something to do with what gigs I choose to go and see. If the same band was playing at The Workers Club\(^\text{17}\) I probably wouldn’t go [and] see the band. If I had a choice between going to see them a week later at Old Bar or a week before at The Workers Club I’d probably go to The Old Bar and I think that’s got a lot to do with the social aspect of it and just the intimacy of it. I don’t really like the layout of The Workers Club. There’s something architecturally about The Old Bar which is also nice. (interview)

Space, social dynamics, and a sense of intimacy are emphasised here as key reasons for Fazio’s loyalty to the Old Bar. The materiality of the venue space is also mentioned as a large part of its appeal, which ties into how it functions in the broader live music ecology, a factor I discuss further in the following chapter (Chapter Four).

The Old Bar acts as an entry-level venue for local bands, feeding Melbourne’s live music ecology by providing a launch pad for musicians yet to establish a strong local following. As a slightly larger venue, The Tote is seen as the ‘next level-up’ or ‘big sister’ to the Old Bar, providing a performance space where bands are the main point-of-attraction. Many interviewees saw a relationship existing between the two venues, both geographically, culturally and socially.

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\(^{17}\) The Workers Club is another live music venue in Fitzroy, featuring a separated front bar and band room.
Located in close proximity to each other (less than a kilometre apart) on the same street (see Figure 2), The Old Bar and The Tote co-exist in a similar geographical place and social space. This is not a competitive relationship, as was outlined by local sound engineer and musician Katie Harrigan:

I mean they [The Old Bar and The Tote] seem pretty related. I think Liam [Matthews, Old Bar owner] was saying that, because they’ve got a matinee on Saturdays they put it on a bit earlier knowing that The Tote has one in the later afternoon. So they’re not really in direct competition, even though they would be rivals and they’re on the same road [Johnston Street]. But I mean they’re fairly similar in terms of getting the kinds of bands that they have in, I guess. Bookings are kind of the same. They’re definitely related. (Katie Harrigan, interview)

This sense of co-existence is reflected in the thoughts of Old Bar owner and booking agent Joel Morrison:

Well The Tote’s sort of like the granddaddy of the music scene in Melbourne. So invariably your bands play there and you get a lot of similar bands coming through and a lot of people from, I guess a lot of the staff and stuff all drink here [at The Old Bar] and become friends here and vice versa and stuff like that. So it is quite the sense of community [and] scene in that you just sort of drift from bar to bar and run into the same people. So it’s only natural that you go from one place to another where your interests lie. (Joel Morrison, interview)

The Tote is an institution in the narrative of Melbourne’s live music scene. This is observed in its role as a headline venue for musicians and is also reflected in the general fondness found in the personal accounts of its patrons, as discussed in the following section.

The Tote

The Old Bar is lucky in comparison to many of its contemporaries. Other local venues such as The Tote have faced closure, as they struggle against increasing operation costs and mounting noise complaints. During my
interview with Andre Fazio, he commented on the emotional cost of venue closures, discussing the obstacles that venue owners and music scene participants have come to expect as a result of gentrification:

I think people get into it because they have a love for it but then it’s such a flawed thing, live music, especially in this city just because there’s so many adversities. There’s the constant threat of being shut down, people moving in next door and redeveloping the place and suddenly there’s a noise complaint. It just seems like there’s a constant struggle from that side and it seems like as soon as you fall in love with somewhere there’s something just around the corner waiting to tear it down and that can be really tough for people. (Andre Fazio, interview)

Fazio considers the emotional investment that regulars and staff place in a venue; its symbolic value—a sense of ‘falling in love’ with the space—and the threat of that being taken away by environmental and economic conditions beyond their control. For those that participate in them, the music scenes that inhabit small venues are almost familial and provide a support network for participants, a point I return to in Chapter Five. However, these scenes do not remain static, and place-based factors such as gentrification can have a profound effect on a venue’s sense of identity.

The Tote proclaims itself to be ‘The Home of ROCK’ in Melbourne (http://thetotehotel.com/ 2019) and has featured in multiple documentaries, most notably Persecution Blues: The Battle for the Tote (van den Dungen 2011), which chronicles the controversy around its abrupt closing and eventual re-opening under new ownership. At the time, this controversy was at the centre of a discussion around live music culture and liquor licensing laws that caused a number of venues to close in 2010, including The Tote. These laws have since been relaxed, but the outpouring of support for the Tote that occurred at the time has solidified the venue’s status in Melbourne’s live music scene.
‘Snoop’ Mitchell, general manager of The Tote, reflected on how gentrification—exemplified in rising rental prices and changing demographics—has affected The Tote’s clientele:

There’s the community who was kind of here or the people who were always around when I first moved here, when I came here in the late 90s… musos who lived nearby because Collingwood was a poorer area, like a cheaper area where people could live. But now the nature of real estate is that it’s too expensive for these people to still live around here really. It seems like the only ones that do work, or used to work here. So it’s a different crew, so they’ve now moved further out, they’re now older, they’re in their mid-thirties and forties now and have started families. (‘Snoop’ Mitchell, interview)

Mitchell’s account resonates with typical notions of gentrification and the intersection this has with lifestyle and ageing (see Bennett 2018, 2013; Bennett and Hodkinson 2012).

The Tote is an interesting case study, as it has been active for long enough to see multiple generations of live music participants engaging with the venue and subsequently aging out of the lifestyle associated with its live music scene. That is not to say that differing age groups are not well represented in live music audiences, but that the heavy drinking, loud volumes, and more excessive physical fan activity often associated with live music venues usually attracts patrons aged in their twenties and thirties (Bennett 2018, p. 52). These observations reflect broader research on music scene participation, aging audiences, and small live music venues (Bennett 2018, p. 49).

The Tote has been a fixture of Melbourne’s inner-north for well over 30 years (http://thetotehotel.com/about/ 2017). The legacy of The Tote is a master-class in myth-making and thus performing at The Tote holds a certain amount of cultural capital. Not only this, but the venue has been heavily impacted by policymakers and developers, social agents that are far
removed from the day-to-day management of the space and its surrounding scene yet still have a profound effect on its sustainability as a live music venue. It is considered by many of my interview participants to be the older ‘big sister’ to The Old Bar, and is the next tier up from The Old Bar in terms of size, status, and heritage. The Tote is therefore a good example of a venue uniquely positioned in the live music ecology of Melbourne’s inner-north, as discussed further in Chapter Four.

A key finding of my research was the manner in which my respondents associated different types of cultural capital with The Tote. Interviewees stated both a need to respect the Tote for its contribution to the scene, but also a scepticism towards a ‘heritagisation’ of the venue space and a wariness of the parochial nature of those that subscribe to its rockist narrative. Prominent local musician Georgia McDonald of Camp Cope (see Figure 10) reflected on the status of The Tote in our interview:

The Tote’s great. People were so like, “What the fuck?” when it got shut down, there’s something really, really special about it that it’s still going. The Tote, it’s a piece of Melbourne’s history. It’s a really big part of the cultural scene of Collingwood. (Georgia McDonald, interview)

This quote from a young musician who, at the time of our interview, would not have been old enough to have lived through the majority of The Tote’s history as a venue, reaffirms the status that the venue has in Melbourne, maintained through vernacular culture and a kind of unofficial heritagising (Strong and Whiting 2018). Further, The Tote’s history of struggle is a prime indicator of its cultural capital. The fact that it survived this period of disruption leant the venue an ‘underdog’ quality that resonates with presumed ideas around ‘Australian values’ (Bode 2006). This cemented The

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18 In the documentary Persecution Blues (van Den Dungen 2011), supports of The Tote can be seen wearing t-shirts emblazoned with the statement ‘ROCKIST’ in plain black-and-white.
19 In the Australian cultural context it is generally considered good sportsmanship to support the presumed loser of a competition or wager, otherwise known as ‘the underdog’.
Chapter 3 - Place

Tote’s place in Melbourne’s live music ecology as a middle-tier venue that caters to a specific clientele and hosts bands with complementary levels of cultural capital to the venue itself. The Tote is also representative of a broad swathe of live music pubs in Australia, known collectively by those that patronise them as ‘the local’.

Figure 10 – Camp Cope: Publicity image (l-r: Kelly-Dawn Hellmrich, Georgia McDonald, Sarah ‘Thomo’ Thompson)
Chapter 3 - Place

‘The Local’ – A Place of Belonging

A sense of belonging motivates music scene participants to invest in small live music venues and reinforces notions of familiarity, consistency, and ‘the local’ as a space of reliable social interaction. Regular Old Bar patron Jo Gardiner spoke to this in our interview:

If we didn’t know anyone here we’d probably still come [to The Old Bar], but might not stick around as long or might not just come down here on a whim on a Tuesday night and know that you’ll see someone. It is very ‘Cheers-y’ in that way, but that’s the handy thing about living behind a pub: it’s your definite local and it really is the old school local. (Jo Gardiner, interview)

This framing of The Old Bar as an ‘old school local’ refers to the Anglo-Australian institution of ‘the local pub’ (Gallan and Gibson 2013). Describing The Old Bar as a ‘local’ aligns it with “the peculiar character of the live music pub as quintessential Australian cultural infrastructure” (Gallan and Gibson 2013, p. 174). Venue manager Dan McKay further elaborated on the role of The Old Bar and The Tote as ‘local pubs’:

Amongst the community these places are legendary, they’re temples of sorts. It’s a place where you can always feel comfortable, and that’s what anyone really wants from their local. And The Tote and the Old Bar are people’s locals… it’s where all your mates are, it’s where all the bands that you like play, and people that have a passion for watching live music. (interview)

The ‘live music pub’ caters to a specific socio-cultural niche and the act of going to the pub is a ritual of everyday Australian life that adheres to dominant narratives of mateship, larrikinism, and social lubrication (Bode 2006). In addition to this, due to the financial struggles beset by small venues such as The Tote and others like it (discussed previously in this chapter), the ‘live music pub’ is aligned with cultural narratives of ‘the underdog’, which take many forms and continue to be reified in the re-telling of Oz rock history and Australian pub rock’s working-class roots (Walker 2012). The
‘live music pub’ has thus been re-framed in terms of the Anglo-Australian notion of the ‘Aussie battler’\(^{20}\) (Bode 2006). This was expressed in the discourse surrounding the venue in the local press and media at the time of The Tote’s closing (Donovan 2010a-2010h; Donovan and Roberts 2010).

The working-class coding of small live music pubs is demonstrated in the vernacular of my case study venues and their regular patrons. Although much of the live music audience is middle-class in background, many participants adopt working-class vernaculars and dispositions when engaging with these spaces. This reflects a socially mobile habitus and the ability to ‘perform’ class that has resulted in accusations of ‘class tourism’, also seen in other realms of cultural consumption associated with working class identities such as the real-ale festivals of Northern England (Spracklen, Laurencic and Kenyon 2013). Such anxieties around class reflect broader distinctions between ‘mainstream’ (i.e. middle-class) and ‘alternative’ nightlife spaces and the desire to keep these as distinct and separate,\(^{21}\) as working-class identities are seen as more authentic in ‘alternative’ spaces such as The Old Bar and The Tote, and are aligned with ‘rockism’ more broadly.

Pubs resonate with the working-class values that Anglo-Australian cultural identity is broadly aligned with, and have long been known as meeting places for such identities and the formation of a sense of belonging among them. Small live music venues represent an intersection of traditional

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\(^{20}\) ‘Aussie battler’ is an Australian colloquialism for ‘ordinary’ individuals triumphing over adversity. In this context, adversity often comprises low pay, environmental hardships, and lack of recognition, historically aligning the ‘Aussie battler’ with white, working-class identities.

\(^{21}\) In their research on Wollongong’s Oxford Tavern, Gallan and Gibson position participation in The Oxford’s music scene as an ‘alternative’ choice, with participants “imagining and constructing ‘otherness’ in relation to the restrictive cultural norms of the commercial mainstream” (2013, p. 179). Such a choice sits comfortably with the assumption that participation in Australian live music scenes revolves heavily around ‘the local pub’ and an associated drinking culture. In this sense, “[p]ubs embody the broad contradictions of Australian society and are important sites of vernacular cultural expression” (Gallan and Gibson 2013, p. 177), despite anxieties around keeping live music pubs working-class and an overall resistance to middle-class gentrification and ‘mainstream’ nightlife.
Australian pub culture and emergent local music scenes that can’t be replicated in larger, arena venues, as these venues don’t allow for the same kinds of intimate cultural experiences and expressions of community that pubs afford. This intersection reflects notions of the everyday, the cultural capital associated with small-scale music making activities, and ‘the local pub’. Musician Chris Drane spoke to this point, referring to the Old Bar and similar venues as ‘social clubs’:

Well it’s more of a social club... —before people had mobile phones and stuff—you’d go to the pub and if nobody knew where you were, they’d call the pub and see if you were there. There’s more of that vibe at some of those pubs. (Chris Drane, musician/bartender, interview)

There is an emphasis here on offline interaction, wherein the physical presence of participants in a specific time and space is at the centre of understanding the scene. This is noteworthy in the current age of cultural production and consumption, as online communities and social media have a large influence on music scenes. This de-emphasis of the online space renders space, place, and the body as central to engagement with small venues, live music events, and the local music scenes that are articulated around them. This was further supported by music industry worker and former Music Victoria staffer Bek Duke:

…it’s almost like venues have replaced community halls, churches and other social clubs like dances you’d have in the 1950s. People will now go to somewhere like a pub that they know their friends might be at [knowing that] the people that go there, they’re probably going to get along with. (interview)

The analogy of a community hall or church—traditional places of worship and social gathering—emphasises sociality in an offline space where participants are physically present and engage as a group. Duke extended her point, emphasising the sense of belonging often found in these venues:

Pretty much no one except my parents that I know go to church so you
don’t have that congregation where you all feel like part of a community. Live music venues are people’s churches, they are their sporting teams basically, so you feel like you are part of something. No one likes to be a total loner, so that’s our social aspect. That’s where we go. (Bek Duke, interview)

The notion of collective participation is significant, as are the memories and experiences generated from such affinities. Such memories and affinities lead to commonly held associations, contributing to the vernacular cultural history of these spaces.

Connections between specific venues and certain bands or genres is common in local music scenes. In this context, ‘social space’ (Bourdieu 2000; Reed-Danahay 2015) and ‘place’ (Connell and Gibson 2003; Massey 1994) are one and the same, both giving form to the spatial component of a cultural field; the local music scene. The idea of ‘the local pub’ has influenced Australian music history since the 1980s heyday of ‘pub rock’, and the impact of venues on the musical practices of Australia’s live acts can be observed in the genre’s name itself. Further to this, Australian live music practices are inherently localised (Walker 2012), and although the live music landscape has endured immeasurable change since the era of ‘pub rock’, such localisation still persists in the practices of the country’s live acts.

As groups of musicians participating in local music scenes—scenes that are sustained by social connection in which venues serve both a valuable and circumscribing function—it is natural that bands gravitate towards certain venues, constructing, and maintaining these as ritualised spaces of socialisation and performance. The identity of a defined place is

22 For example, “[a]s Peter Garett said in 1984 in The Big Australian Rock Book: ‘Every Australian band comes from a different pub, and it’s there they define what they are about. Every band remembers that pub, and it’s more than sentimental value; it’s something much stronger.’ This is the unique local identity of Australian music... Garrett’s old band Midnight Oil couldn’t have come from anywhere but Sydney, anywhere but the northern beaches, and even more specifically, anywhere but the Royal Antler Hotel at North Narrabeen” (Walker 2012, p. 18).
simultaneously constructed while also informing the practices of those making music in said place. The connection between specific bands and my case study venues is explored further in the following chapters, specifically Chapter Five, which contains case studies of two prominent local acts.

Finally, Australia’s live music scene is heavily associated with alcohol, and this is both historically noteworthy in terms of the pub rock of our musical past (as discussed above) and problematic given the media-driven link between alcohol and violence. Here, place and identity are often framed in a negative light and the moral panic around alcohol-fuelled violence has led to an incorrect assumption that live music, alcohol, and violence are related. This moral panic continues to impact licensed live music venues on a regular basis (Homan 2014; Homan 2010; Shaw 2010a, 2010b), as the case of The Tote so clearly demonstrates. Despite these associations, the significance of local music scenes and the role of place in shaping notions of identity should not be discounted. Such scenes have distinct benefits for those that engage with them, such as a sense of community, belonging, and a mutual network of support. As local sound engineer and musician Lara Soulio stated:

Everyone helps each other out. There seems to be this knowledge, like if someone’s in trouble or needs a place to crash or if someone needs help booking a show, everyone kind of knows what everyone’s situation is. Or at least that’s what I find from working at Old Bar. And there’s a general element of care... whenever something is going on that I can’t get done, if I tell someone, it’s always that group of people that are first to help. (Lara Soulio, interview)

Here Soulio describes a support network that stems from The Old Bar, referring to the relationships and social situations that make up the scene. Such knowledge comes only with immersion and a particular sense of habitus, reinforcing both the culture of participation and its benefits, as well as the somewhat closed nature of the scene.
Chapter 3 - Place

Conclusion

Place strongly influences the social process of participating in and engaging with music scenes. The geographical context and socio-historical setting of The Old Bar and The Tote contributes to their status in the local live music ecology, with place also influencing how scene participants engage with these spaces. A distinct and identifiable local music scene that is shared across these two venues can be observed, one that overlaps and inhabits much of the same social space. Place, social space, and cultural capital are interconnected in a web of exchange and identity formation. Social space is used to identify an individual’s position in an artistic field; their status, degree of influence, and structural relations to economic and cultural resources as “[o] ne’s ‘objective relation’ to another is one’s proximity to them in social space” (Bottero and Crossley 2011, p. 101). Here, social space and place intersect, articulating the same understandings of meaning and identity through cultural consumption and production associated with place. A place-based live music scene serves as a prime example of an artistic field. Further, social relationships are integral to the construction of social space and are demonstrated in the ongoing production and mobilisation of social capital (Bottero and Crossley 2011, p. 102).

The particular music scene analysed here is concentrated in the inner-northern Melbourne suburbs of Fitzroy and Collingwood. This scene was observed as sharing many of the same participants—and therefore much of the same social space—by my respondents:

It seems to be like you see the same heads at the same things, especially around The Old Bar and The Tote. There are people that I see there whenever I go to those places or if I’m in that area. I don’t think it’s necessarily on purpose either I think it just works out that way. People go where they’re comfortable. (Jarrod Brown, interview)
Habitus plays an important role in facilitating access to certain spaces. Each venue is coded with distinctive forms of cultural capital and caters towards specific demographics. The Old Bar and The Tote exist on a similar spectrum of cultural capital, habitus, and social space, making them more accessible to participants that share these characteristics, a topic I will discuss further in my chapter on ‘scene’ (Chapter Five). Furthermore, The Tote is often compared to The Old Bar not as a business rival, but as the next step up in the local live music ecology. This co-existence is key to the sustainability of the live music ecology, a concept I discuss in-depth in the following chapter (Chapter Four).

This chapter (Chapter Three) has discussed the localities of Melbourne’s inner-north relevant to my research, specifically the suburbs of Fitzroy and Collingwood, along with my case study venues of The Old Bar and The Tote and how they are situated in these suburbs as social hubs and places of belonging for the local live music scene. Throughout, I have defined ‘space’ and ‘place’ as both geographical and socio-cultural formations that intersect to inform an idea of the local music scene of Melbourne’s inner-north as a defined social space specific to a delineated area, as well as the social interactions that take place within and between this area and my case study venues. This is important as it emphasises the spatiality inherent in discussions of local music scenes and the role that shared social space plays in facilitating the common associations that make scenes identifiable as social formations. This spatiality and the materiality of the venue spaces themselves is discussed further in the following chapter, which demonstrates how each venue is positioned in the live music ecology based on a variety of factors, both material and social.
Chapter 4 – The ‘Live Music Ecology’

Small live music venues function as social hubs for music scenes and as performance spaces for emerging artists. These venues are positioned towards the bottom of a tiered hierarchy—a ‘pecking order’—of performance spaces, from the smallest hole-in-the-wall bars to the largest concert arenas, contributing to and bolstering its’ foundation. Venue spaces rely on interconnected and disparate social actors to give them form and function, as well as hindering and limiting this sense of function. The broader live music culture of the city is also integral, as it provides venues with artists and audiences. This is the ‘live music ecology’; a series of spaces and institutions that make up and ‘map onto’ a city’s live music scene.

Whereas a local music scene is that network of participants engaged in cultural practices and the interactions between them in a given time and place, the live music ecology encompasses the materiality of venue spaces and their effect on the scene, those ‘outsider’ agents that are not scene participants yet still influence cultural practice (e.g. policymakers, developers etc.), and the broader live music culture that small live music venues build on and feed into. This chapter analyses the live music ecology as it relates to my case study venues. The term is defined in line with recent work on the UK Live Music Census, as well as other research on ‘ecology’ in the humanities more broadly. Throughout this chapter I demonstrate how small live music venues are positioned in the live music ecology and how my case study venues are interrelated, emphasising materiality in this discussion. Returning to my research question I discuss how The Old Bar and The Tote retain
social and cultural value within the live music ecology, specifically in regards to venue booking agents, the effect they have on these forms of value, and the effect this has on each venue’s status in the live music ecology. I also discuss how the live music ecology relates to scene theory and how the two concepts intersect, demonstrating how music scenes feed the live music ecology by providing a foundation of social interaction and exchange that acts as a bedrock for the ecology to build upon.

This chapter analyses each case study venue, delineating their status in the city’s live music ecology and how different social agents influence each space. A juxtaposition between The Old Bar and The Tote is made, with The Old Bar positioned as a ‘little sister’ to The Tote amongst the venues of Melbourne’s inner-north (Therese Martschinke, interview). The status of each of these venues in the live music ecology is relevant to my research question, as an understanding of how each venue functions in the ecology is directly related to what these venues contribute to said ecology. Their social and cultural value is concomitant with their roles as performance sites and as social hubs for local music scenes, both of which can be observed in the way that small venue spaces accommodate the key social interactions that music scenes are comprised of. These interactions are reliant on socially conducive environments, such as the ‘front bar’ and ‘band room’ of small music venues, and are further influenced by the aesthetics of each venue space; décor, lighting and the visual media (posters etc.) that adorn their walls. The role of venue booking agents and their mobilisation of social and cultural capital—and therefore the creation of social and cultural value—is also analysed.

Drawing on the knowledge of musicians, bar staff, venue owners, booking agents and other scene participants, this chapter analyses the visual aesthetic of each venue to get a sense of how cultural narratives are
embodied in these spaces. Following this I discuss the intra-venue spaces of the front bar and band room fundamental to the role of live music venues as cultural spaces and hubs for local music scenes, as well as how social actors from outside the scene affect the space. Finally, I conclude the chapter with a discussion of venue booking agents, their roles as cultural gatekeepers, curators, and tastemakers, and how this affects and affirms each venues status in the live music ecology.

An Ecological Approach to Live Music

Local music scenes benefit from how easily participants can move between venue spaces. In addition to this, music scenes are dependent on the materiality of the venue spaces themselves (Behr et al 2016), as cultural narratives around live music need space and place to imbue venues with meaning (Gallan and Gibson 2013). The materiality of music venues—the actual physical make-up of the buildings themselves—effects how each space is experienced by patrons, as well as the types of live music events that are hosted therein. This is a key consideration in any study of live music ecologies. This materiality also relates to ‘social space’ as an intersection between the cultural field of a local music scene and the physical space of the live music venue; the “spatiality inherent in sociality” (Reed-Danahay 2015, p. 70).

The aim of this chapter is to present an insight into how The Old Bar, The Tote, and the disparate social actors that curate, manage, and impact on these spaces are placed in the broader live music ecology of Melbourne’s inner-north. Booking agents, for example, create a sense of space in their curation of performance events, but these events are shaped and influenced by the material environment of each venue, the social actors that collaborate
to ensure the live music event goes ahead (as well as those that have an encumbering effect on these events), and the ongoing sustainability of Melbourne’s live music culture. These factors sit outside the concerns of scenes, and more accurately encompassed within a ‘live music ecology’.

An ecological approach to live music draws attention to three main areas of concern:

1. **The materiality of venues;**
   
   Such buildings may or may not have been constructed as musical sites; even when they are, the musical ideology inscribed in their physical and acoustic design may or may not be compatible with the physical symbolization of contemporary musical communities. Either way, buildings do not just exist in people’s minds. (Behr et al 2016, p. 19)

2. **The interdependence of otherwise disparate social actors;**
   
   A musical event is not just cultural, the result of ideological agreement among actors who, in coming to such agreement, form a musical world. A live music event also involves constant negotiation with people who are not part of a shared ideological construct. The role of the promoter [booking agent] is often overlooked as they intersect and interact with multiple actors to ensure the live music event goes ahead. (Behr et al 2016, p. 19)

3. **The sustainability of the resulting live music culture;**
   
   When policy-makers are considering how to sustain a local musical culture or bolster a national musical economy, it is important that they understand the relationship between all the factors... Similarly, while the primary goal of commercial promoters is to pursue their own profits, they too need to be aware that a policy which, in competitive terms, makes it impossible for small promoters or venues to survive will, in the long term, have a decisive impact on their own sustainability. (Behr et al 2016, p. 20).

Taking these into account, the live music ecology relies on a variety of spaces and activities to bring it into being. I utilise these three points as a means of framing discussion around the value of live music ecologies, the role of small
venues within them, the social agents that impact their functioning and sustainability, and how they differ from previous definitions of music scenes.

Ecology? Scene? Or all of the above?

My definition of the ‘live music ecology’ reflects a recent statement by MusicNSW, the peak body for the music industry in New South Wales, in which they described the industry as a “complex ecosystem with many moving parts” (New South Wales Parliament 2018, p. 12). The importance of such a network has been previously discussed (Homan 2014; Stahl 2003), but has only been defined explicitly in recent years (Behr et al 2016). In the following section I define the live music ecology as a distinct term, drawing on work by scholars in the UK.

The live music ecology encompasses those organisations, material concerns, and social actors that impact on, contribute to, and affect the live music event, and is articulated via three factors (discussed previously): venue spaces, ‘outsider’ social agents, and an ongoing live music culture (Behr et al 2016). If live music scenes consist of social actors interacting and working together in a delineated field of practice, albeit transient and ephemeral, then the organisations, materiality, and interdependence between disparate social actors encompassed within the live music ecology are what music scenes are articulated around. This is an important point, as a healthy live music ecology is necessary to maintain a sustainable live music culture and a proliferation of diverse and robust music scenes. The collapse of the live music ecology in New South Wales is evidence of this, as the loss of many small live music venues due to severe lockout laws and noise restrictions has significantly

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1 For example, Shane Homan described key aspects of the live music ecology—a network of bricks- and-mortar spaces and interdependent relationships that coalesce to form the “infrastructure of a music city”—without giving this infrastructure a formal name (Homan 2014, pp. 149-150).
kneecapped the local music industry (New South Wales Parliament 2018, p. 30). As Executive Producer of Sounds Australia Millie Millgate stated, “[w]e cannot do our job and bring New South Wales artists through at that global level if there is no robust foundation. It is a pyramid. You need the venues working” (New South Wales Parliament 2018, p. 12). A thriving music industry is therefore dependent on a robust foundation of small live music venues (New South Wales Parliament 2018, p. 31). Small venues are therefore an integral underpinning component of the live music ecology at large.

The live music ecology is the formal embodiment of the live music industry. However, the term ‘industry’ connotes a market designed for profit and by competition. Rather than a capitalist system wherein businesses compete for consumer interest, the live music ecology is less oriented toward competition. Although there are profits to be made in the live music sector these are limited, and—in terms of the everyday lives of its participants—are often outweighed by social and cultural capital accrued through engagement. In fact, prioritising economic output over cultural value often has a destructive effect on economic systems, in much the same way that environmental destruction affects the economy in the long-term (Throsby 1999, p. 9). Further, the flow-on effects of a sustainable live music culture often outweigh economic benefits, or at least need to be converted into economic capital before they can be considered valuable. Valuing the live music ecology in purely economic terms is therefore misguided, as the cultural and social value of the ecology is more far reaching than economic output. This is the ‘economic world reversed’ (Bourdieu 1993), in which social, cultural, and symbolic capital are considered payment for
participation. A Bourdieusian framework of understanding is preferred here, wherein alternative forms of capital are considered.

Social and cultural capital are key components of any live music ecology, as promoters and musicians regularly trade in these in order to ensure the planning and success of the live music event. However, such a business model is ripe for exploitation, and concert promotion has previously been described as “a mess of contradictions—a contract based business without contracts, an exploitative business based on face-to-face goodwill, a highly regulated business which often seems close to chaotic (and criminal)” (Frith 2010, pp. 2-3). The live music ecology makes such contradictions salient and aims to reconcile them in a framework that considers each while also holding a view towards the ‘bigger picture’.

Building on this, the live music ecology places an emphasis on live music above other forms of media (e.g. recorded music, video clips, house music etc.), and therefore the venues, social actors, and live music culture that influence the live music event.

The term ‘ecology’\(^2\) has experienced an increased usage across academic studies of popular music. Although it has been criticized as too broad to account for the complexities of the music sector (Keogh 2013), the

\(^2\) ‘Ecology’ has been applied to the humanities in a variety of ways. This has caused confusion between the terms’ multiple applications, as “[e]cology has been used across the humanities and social sciences to contextualize aspects of social and cultural life since the mid-20th century” (Keogh and Collinson 2016, p. 1). Coercion of the term ‘ecology’ by commerce has a long history in economics. Ernst Haeckley first defined the term via an analogy to free market economics, describing it as “the economy of nature” (Stauffer 1957, p. 141). Nature has often provided inspiration for human values to be organised around and ‘music ecology’ has its own body of literature, one that is varied and often conflicting (Keogh and Collinson 2016, p. 8). In the arts, the ecology trope has been deployed to legitimise and ‘naturalise’ capitalistic and neoliberal systems of power, and the term ‘cultural ecology’ has been utilised by governments to promote competition between arts organisations and funding models. In this context, ‘ecology’ is used to submerge systems of power that influence flows of capital, sinking these in a web of metaphor, as “[t]he cultural ecology model—one based on a pastoral idea of nature—has the ideological effect of naturalizing power relationships, masking conflict, and legitimizing hierarchies by exscribing them” (Keogh and Collinson 2016, p. 11). Finally, when referring to for-profit creative industries, the term ‘cultural ecology’ takes the neoliberal edge off, reducing such organisations to a state of passivity and masking the corporate boards and executive decisions that drive arts bodies.
ecology trope is useful when describing the economic and social networks responsible for live music and for answering the questions of how and why a particular concert event happens (Behr, Brennan, Cloonan, Frith and Webster 2016, p. 5). I follow here the definition of ‘live music ecology’ outlined by Simon Frith and his colleagues (Behr et al 2016). This term was first utilised to describe the network of live music production, social connections, and events that link local DIY artists to massive multi-national corporations such as Live Nation (Frith 2010, p. 3). It is further outlined in recent publications by Frith’s colleagues at the Live Music Exchange (Behr et al 2016; Behr, Brennan, and Cloonan 2014; Frith et al 2012). This approach prioritises material and logistic factors, emphasising live music production. Although scene is a useful descriptor for similar types of activities, the live music ecology places an emphasis on the live music event, its catalysts and its deterrents. Small venues play a central role here, as they are placed at the nexus between the live music ecology and local music scenes.

Local scenes and the live music ecology intersect in spaces such as the small venues of Melbourne’s inner-north. Whereas concepts such as ‘translocalism’ and ‘virtual scenes’ de-emphasise the role of place, the live music ecology puts social collaboration in a particular time and place, centring these in discussions around live music culture. This is contrasted against definitions of ‘scene’, which “describes a social process of music meaning-making which is not limited by the materiality of place” (Behr et al 2016, p. 6).

The materiality of venue spaces sits at the core of my research. The built environments of venues are a very real factor in the roles they perform. Therefore, the live music ecology serves as a valuable term in discussions of place, space, and the music scenes threaded throughout. Although
proponents of ‘scene’ such as Ian Rogers and Andy Bennett would argue that the term already takes the live music ecology into account (2016a), scenes are more concerned with the fluidity of identity than the rigidity of venue spaces or the influence of social actors operating outside of the scene. Further, “[a]n ecological study of live music means studying social agents which are not in any coherent ideological way members of the social networks that are described by Becker’s art worlds, Bourdieu’s cultural fields, or Finnegan’s social pathways” (Behr et al 2016, p. 6). These social agents, or ‘outsiders’, impact the live music ecology despite not otherwise acting as participants in the scene. Therefore, the live music ecology is a more holistic way of understanding the factors necessary for a live music event to take place.

The live music ecology is a way of framing the social relations that affect music-making activities which accounts for the material and physical aspects of musical creation and performance that previous descriptors of cultural practice have overlooked (Behr, Brennan, Cloonan, Frith and Webster 2016, p. 6). Live music ecology is therefore a more well-rounded way of framing live music practices and the venues they take place in. The term encompasses the interrelationships between venues of different sizes and specialities across cityscapes, and the flows of capital and labour that surround and move between them. In a report to government, Behr, Brennan and Cloonan use ‘ecology’ to consider live music and its dependence on venues of all sizes (2014, p. 3). Their report investigates a variety of venues in Camden, Glasgow, and Leeds, and discusses how these venues perform distinct roles in the live music ecology of each city (Behr, Brennan and Cloonan 2014, p. 10). Here, the live music ecology is used to explain the complexities of funding, profit, charity, volunteer work, and
other flows of labour and capital impacting the live music sector that are not easily reducible to either free-market economics or state-support. These flows of labour and capital are interdependent on otherwise disparate social actors who affect the production of live music events, both directly and indirectly, “to produce a value chain from the grassroots to the apex of commercial activity” (Behr, Brennan and Cloonan 2014, p. 3).

The term ‘ecology’ implies a system that is mutually benevolent and ‘balanced’. Participants in Melbourne’s local music scene have often observed a communal atmosphere based on reciprocity and mutual respect, contributing to the ecology hypothesis. As Evan Purdey, former Old Bar staff member and musician stated:

I don’t think it’s ever felt competitive, at least not from my standpoint. Like, it’s never been “Oh well the Tote’s sold out, why aren’t we selling out?”. It’s like “Oh they’re having an awesome night right now, and then maybe I’ll head up and have a drink there later”. It’s always been more of a pat on the back and we’re all in this together kind of a vibe between the two places, which I think is really sweet. (Evan Purdey, interview)

The Tote and The Old Bar are popular sites of interaction between local music scene participants, and each venue’s status in the live music ecology is interrelated and interdependent. Both venues are valuable spaces in the context of the local live music ecology, as they facilitate and contribute to the same music scenes. Jarrod Brown discussed the similarities between The Old Bar and The Tote in our fieldwork interview:

They share a lot of people, they share a lot of punters, so I think they seem to coexist. They share a lot of a vague sound I think, but it seems to work well. I’m not aware of any push from either of those two venues to defeat the other one, it is what it is. Take either of them away and you’d lose something. (Jarrod Brown, interview)

Brown stresses that The Tote and The Old Bar are not in competition with one another, despite the fact that they cater to a similar audience and are
located on the same street, just nine-hundred metres apart. This coexistence is representative of each venue’s position in the live music ecology, and such positions are particularly interesting when considering these venues as small businesses. As Old Bar manager Jen Drane stated at interview, “I think they [The Old Bar and The Tote] would have to have some sort of amicable relationship because they are pretty much doing almost the same thing, so they would want to be friends, not enemies”. If music scenes represent horizontal systems of human relationships and social interaction then the live music ecology is constructed in more vertical, yet mutually beneficial terms of interdependence. Herein lies the relevance of the term ‘ecology’. As a dominant aspect of their material environment, the visual and cultural aesthetics of each venue space also play into their positioning in the live music ecology and attraction for punters.

The Aesthetic

The Old Bar and The Tote host a variety of amateur, semi-professional, and professional bands over a usual week of live music events. These venues are aligned with a distinctly ‘rockist’ musical aesthetic (Frere-Jones 2003; Sanneh 2004; Wolk 2006), with the vast majority of their featured bands being largely guitar-centric in nature. Although a broad array of musical genres are performed across the diversity of these acts, there are recurrent themes that implicate rock’s narrative of ‘authenticity’ (Grazian 2004). The music that is performed at The Old Bar and The Tote is largely aligned with this narrative, as well as notions of rock as a working class pursuit.

In terms of visual aesthetic, The Old Bar is a quintessential dive bar (see Figure 11), a space where a palpable sense of character and cumulative history—signified in the posters, patron-drawn pictures and cultural
Chapter 4 - Ecology

iconography that cover the venue’s walls—take precedence over visual cohesion. As musician and bartender Georgia McDonald described it:

Just the vibe of the thing. The photos on the wall of all the staff, the owners, Joel, Singa, Liam, their funny portraits, the staff portraits, the fireplace, it’s just a homely small place. It’s red and its wood stairs that are probably going to break soon. It’s such a small little space that it’s got so much packed into it, heaps of things on the walls and on the roof. It’s really cool. It feels like a teenager’s bedroom, like a rebellious, cool, music teenager. (Georgia McDonald, interview)

The visual aesthetic of The Old Bar is a fragmented hodgepodge of diverse cultural signifiers, all tying into the myth of The Old Bar as an alternative nightlife space and dedicated live music venue. This is cultural capital objectified and embodied in the venue space itself, packaging The Old Bar as an authentic experience. In this context “authenticity is not an objective quality inherent in things, but rather an argument that people make about the things in the world that they value” (Grazian 2004, p. 138). The manufacturing of this authenticity is something that The Old Bar benefits from economically, through the attraction of those that subscribe to its aesthetic, and it is here that we see the cultural capital inherent in the materiality of the space subsequently converted into economic capital.

Bartender and musician Chris Drane made specific reference to the aesthetic of the Old Bar in our interview:

Music, even décor and lighting and stuff, I personally like a bar that’s got some character and has been lived in... that filthy, dive bar vibe. You feel comfortable. I like going to some little bars that don’t have music here and there... but I generally like it when there’s a band playing, you feel like you can sit there and have a chat to somebody and nestle in... You feel comfortable. (Chris Drane, interview)

This emphasis on character, comfort, and a sense of feeling ‘lived in’ aligns Drane’s response with a notion of The Old Bar as being a ‘home away from home’. The environment also seems to provide a sense of belonging for him; a place where he can be himself. However, as a frequent patron of the venue
and active local musician, Drane holds the relevant cultural and social capital to make himself feel particularly comfortable in these spaces.

The Tote’s aesthetic is similar to that of The Old Bar, with an emphasis on the venue’s inner décor. This largely consists of old gig posters (see Figure 12), which code the space and align it with a particular cultural narrative, “creating a sense of the venues’ embeddedness in the collective memory and history of the musical past” (Strong and Whiting 2018, p. 2). The Tote and The Old Bar have been subject to multiple owners and management over their many years of operation. This plays a role in their narrative, as management often take on the role of ‘caretakers’ in an attempt to maintain each establishment’s reputation. As ‘Snoop’ Mitchell stated:

The Tote’s been around for 30 years now, and you don’t feel like you’re really in charge of The Tote, you feel like you’re a temporary caretaker until the next crew comes through. So you don’t want to do anything to fuck it up, you don’t want to be the reason for a kind of catalyst if something bad happens to the place. In that respect, there’s always been this kind of feeling around the Tote that it’s almost run by the punters, and it’s to a point where you’re not going to redo the front bar to make it look nice and clean, because The Tote doesn’t go for it. The Tote will never make mega profits, because the thinking behind it is “Well, we could do this…” but if the regular clientele of The Tote is going to react badly, then you don’t do it. It keeps the feeling of the place or the style of the place what it should be and what it is. If it’s still falling down, breaking down, falling apart, it’s exactly how we remember it is as The Tote. ‘(Snoop’ Mitchell, interview)

Cultural capital plays a large part in establishing a sense of what The Tote ‘is’. The aesthetic, the decor, the ‘vibe’ are all maintained in a perpetual state of ‘falling apart’ by the management. These are also inscribed in the collective memory of punters, which informs what people assume The Tote to ‘be.’
Figure 11 - The Old Bar: Band room interior, including wall and ceiling posters

Figure 12 - The Tote: Front bar interior, including wall and stairwell posters
Chapter 4 - Ecology

The role of the ‘lived’ physical environment of the venue space is relevant to discussions of aesthetics and décor, particularly in regards to the space beyond the stage. As signifiers of local music events, past and future, venue posters stand-in for the popular music event, re-perpetuating the discourse surrounding these events in the space they occurred or will occur (Strong and Whiting 2018, pp. 4-5). Posters play a role in coding musical spaces such as The Tote and The Old Bar, imbuing them with types of meaning that are directly linked to notions of heritage, collective memory, and cultural capital, contributing to an identifiable sense of scene.

On a fundamental level the posters “show it’s a band venue” (Joel Morrison, interview), acting as a short-hand to let visitors know what the space is and what types of bands they are likely to see there. More importantly however, posters are used to deepen a sense of community through reminding punters of shared experiences and the support for bands that the venue provides, inclining the field of the venue space towards those with a congruent sense of habitus. As Morrison answered when asked why The Old Bar keep old gig posters on the walls:

To reward local bands that we like, to show that we’re behind them, that they’ve played here and we hope that they play here again… It’s good to look back and say, oh fuck I was at that gig. And it’s good for bands—I know when I go to other pubs and see my band’s posters up in the toilet from a gig I played a year or two ago, it makes you feel good. (Joel Morrison, interview)

These comments reflect the significance of the “shared narratives of everyday life” (Peterson and Bennett’s 2004, p. 7) that are constructed in and around music scenes. The Old Bar maintains a close relationship with bands they see as representative of the venue’s cultural narrative via the deployment of specific posters throughout the venue space (Strong and Whiting 2018, p. 5). The cultural capital attained by aligning the venue with particular bands
strengthens a sense of identity, solidifying the cultural narrative of these venues and their status in the local live music ecology.

Small venues such as The Old Bar and The Tote are recreated anew night after night, within a specific horizon of possibility. Although many elements remain static, each live music event has the potential to be very different from the last depending on those involved (such as the musicians, the audience, and the staff), along with the social, cultural and economic capital mobilised by these scene participants (discussed further in Chapter Five). However, the physical space of the venue remains largely unchanged, and each live music event and its associated social experiences take place in a defined set of limitations.

**Materiality, Sociality, and Sustainability**

The live music ecology relies on a network of interdependent yet disparate social actors (Behr et al 2016, p. 19). Bands navigate the pecking order of the live music ecology, performing at various venues in different roles. Along the way they must negotiate with venue bookers, sound engineers, other bands, their own bandmates, bar staff, door staff, security etc. Furthermore, the materiality of venue spaces impacts the sustainability of live music cultures (Behr et al 2016). The Tote can only host so many performances per week. The systems of power and status that appear out of the use of these spaces inform the practices of local musicians. For example, an up-and-coming local band might be relegated to the upstairs band room (see Figure 6) if an interstate headliner is performing in the main band room (see Figure 5). Bands have to negotiate for use of each space while also negotiating with multiple industry and hospitality workers, such as band bookers, sound engineers, and bar staff (Behr et al 2016, p. 19). Therefore, musicians are
constantly engaging with the live music ecology out of necessity and must negotiate and renegotiate their place in it through the deployment of various kinds of capital. However, the role of venues in the live music ecology is markedly different.

Rather than competing for the same resources, such as share of the product (i.e. musicians and performers) or consumers (i.e. patrons and concert-goers), The Old Bar and The Tote occupy a similar status in Melbourne’s live music ecology that benefits each venue as a whole. Bands that emerge through the local scene by playing The Old Bar might move on to bigger audiences at The Tote, while The Old Bar (with its later licensing hours) functions as an after-party venue for gigs at The Tote. Similarities between the two venues extend to not only their clientele and the types of musical genres performed therein, but each venue’s visual aesthetic, as well as their bar staff, security and door staff, and the physical spaces themselves. However, the actual intra-venue spaces, the front bar and band rooms, are all distinct areas of social interaction. Bar staff play a large role in informing these spaces, as do other patrons, musicians and security staff.

The Venue Space

I have separated my analysis of the venue spaces themselves into two sections focusing on ‘the front bar’ and ‘the band room’ as distinct sites. These are discussed with specific reference to my participant interviews, drawing on descriptions of each venue’s front bar and band room. My discussion of the front bar centres on the role of staff, patrons, and the atmosphere or ‘vibe’ in terms of spatial and social concerns. This is juxtaposed against the performative aspects of the band room and the role that musicians, audience members and other participants play in this space.
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Participants in my study identified a spatial differentiation between each venue’s front bar—primarily an area synonymous with drinking, socialising and leisure activities (such as playing pool, billiards, or darts)—and the dedicated performance space of the ‘band room’. The front bar is associated with a social atmosphere. Old Bar manager and musician Dan McKay discussed the ‘front bar vibe’ in reference to the social interactions between musicians, patrons, and bartenders:

I’ll still recommend bands that I see here, like we generally tell the owners who’s a good band, and we tell other people. If people come and go, ‘See any good bands?’; because they might not go out that much and we see bands all the time, and I’ll go, ‘Oh the Infants are good, Palm Springs is good, Batpiss you’ve got to see, Flour [as well], you know, stuff like that. And that goes with that community thing... like everyone knows everyone and everyone’s talking about their mates’ bands or that sort of front bar vibe. (Dan McKay, interview)

The front bar is a place to network and socialise with other musicians and fans; a social space wherein sociality and spatiality are co-constructed. The front bar is also aligned with a social environment where ‘everyone knows everyone’. In this context, the bartender is an authority on the local music scene as they ‘see bands all the time’. Patrons ask the bartender for recommendations as they are entrenched in the everyday goings-on of the scene and carry a certain amount of cultural capital with them. This is exchanged for economic capital, as the bartender serves both drinks and tacit knowledge.

In most venues the front bar is spatially separated from the band room. Live music enthusiast and creative industries professional Claire Portek described a night at The Tote during which her partner and herself spent most of their time in the front bar:

There was a band that was great but we turned up and they were already sold out and so we just hung out in the front bar and when people came in to get drinks in-between bands we got to chat to people, chat to our
Portek makes it clear that the front bar is a social space removed from the band room. The live music experience is still the primary point of attraction, and although they were not able to participate, Portek and her partner were able to socialise with those participants who were.

The front bar of a live music venue is a social space beholden to but not necessarily defined by the live music experience; a space for interaction, networking, and the sharing of common interests. Portek made a clear distinction between The Tote’s front bar and band room (back bar):

It’s kind of front bar or back bar, it’s a great place to see bands. More than likely depending on who you’re going to see, you will know a bunch of people in the crowd, it’s a great place to piss on afterwards, it’s around the corner from my house. (Claire Portek, interview)

The front bar also hosts bands, usually on weekday or Sunday afternoons. However, it remains primarily a drinking space, particularly at the peak times of Friday and Saturday nights. The main band room (see Figure 5) is only open to the public during musical performances. The same applies to the upstairs band room (see Figure 6). As both band rooms are dedicated performance spaces their primary function is hosting bands, whereas the front bar is only used as a performance space occasionally.

In contrast, The Old Bar’s front bar is located next to its band room (see Figure 7), so that the sound and crowd spills into the front bar area. This permeation of spaces is due to The Old Bar’s small size and narrow layout. A few of my interview participants responded specifically to the dialectic that occurs between the front bar and band room of certain venues. Musician Chris Drane gave a detailed description:

I go into The Old Bar and there’s a casual vibe and you might not even be there to see a specific band, but you end up finding a band that you
really like that night. Whereas you go to Howler\textsuperscript{3}, you buy a ticket, and you’re there for a very specific purpose. Same with The Curtin\textsuperscript{4}, although the Curtin’s got a good front bar, it’s just not my local or whatever. The Corner\textsuperscript{5}, I used to frequent more, as just a punter to go and hang out, but that’s changed a lot over the years as well. It’s much more, I don’t want to say segregated, but this is the crew that goes upstairs to the beer garden, this is the crew who drinks in the front bar, and this is the crew who goes to watch the bands. Very specific distinctions between them. But I’ll often go to The Public Bar and just sit at the bar all day.\textsuperscript{6} I can hear what the band is like and I might not necessarily want to go and see them, so I won’t be involved in that aspect. There’s different bars with different vibes. (Chris Drane, interview)

Space matters. How music scene participants move through venue spaces changes their perception of each venue and the live music experience as a whole. Drane makes it clear that those venues that lack a clear boundary between the front bar and band room have a more relaxed, informal vibe. Venues with dedicated band rooms are inherently more formalised. The distinction between the front bar and band room creates a divide between an informal social space and a space for the consumption of live music.

The Front Bar

The ‘front bar’ is located close to the entrance of a venue, in easy sight and reach of anyone entering. It is the first point of call for patrons and its placement in a venue is significant because of this. It is also the primary

\textsuperscript{3} Howler is a medium-sized live music venue in Melbourne’s northern suburb of Brunswick, which features a very clear separation between the band room and front bar, both in terms of the music, atmosphere, and clientele.

\textsuperscript{4} The Curtin Hotel is a medium-sized venue in Melbourne’s inner suburb of Carlton wherein the front bar and dining room make up the ground floor, with the band room located upstairs.

\textsuperscript{5} The Corner Hotel is a larger, dedicated live music venue with a medium-sized band room (800 cap.) that features touring international and popular Australian headline acts. The Corner operates almost as three separate businesses, with the band room containing multiple bars and stages and the ‘front bar’ encompassing the rest of the ground floor (featuring pool tables and games areas), while the upstairs beer garden also has a separate bar and kitchen serving food and hosting corporate events and parties.

\textsuperscript{6} The band room at The Public Bar is separated from the front bar by the bar area itself, demarcating these spaces quite clearly. However, this division is only spatial, as those in the front bar can still see into the band room and hear the band performing if they are seated in the front bar.
point-of-sale and therefore serves a crucial financial purpose. The ‘front bar culture’ of a venue makes an important contribution to its character and aesthetic, and is distinct from the live music experience of the band room. As Claire Portek explains:

Well, [the front bar is] an area that’s a little bit away from the music, not everyone wants to go and see all three bands and stand in the band room for those three bands, it’s much more of a place you can talk and a place you can have conversations with friends… You get to chat in a way that you can’t when you’re in the middle of the band room. (Claire Portek, interview)

The front bar is essential to the vernacular culture of small venues, acting as a space ‘next to the music’, where patrons can relax, socialise and play. A sense of scene is established in the exchanges that occur around the bar, enacting Straw’s “purposeless sociability” (2001, p. 250). This differs from the social dynamic of the band room, which is inherently more rigid and fixed.

Interviewees often referred to the front bar of a venue as being “like a club house” (Andre Fazio, interview); spaces where a sense of familiarity, belonging, and sociality pervade. Regulars, staff, and musicians responded similarly, stating “[y]ou know everyone there, it’s like Cheers. Everyone knows your name” (Katie Drane, interview). References to the popular American situation comedy Cheers were common, with interviewees citing similarities between The Old Bar and the show’s central premise of a bar populated by a group of eccentric regulars (Andre Fazio, interview; Chris Drane, interview; Katie Drane, interview; Jo Gardiner, interview; Joel Morrison, interview). Like the show, locals meet to drink, relax and socialise, but also to engage with live music. However, this sense of comfort and sociality is entirely dependent on each participants’ habitus-field congruence, and their distinct cultural and social capital.
As a social space, the front bar of The Old Bar has been closely curated by the owners and other venue staff. Owner and band booker Joel Morrison stated that the owners intentionally fostered the familiarity, community, and social cohesion inherent in the social space of The Old Bar, inclining the venue towards those with complementary habitus:

It makes it more of a social gathering and people tend to look out for the place a little bit more than they would maybe in a bigger place, because they feel removed from something that’s happening... That’s the thing as well, cultivating a place where everyone feels comfortable and safe and wanting to be here and feeling a little bit of ownership. We like our patrons to feel like this is their place as well as the staff’s, so that they will look after it and we’ll look after them... Because we’ve both [Joel and co-owner Liam Matthews] been patrons of bars involved in the music scene, we noticed before what we wanted from bars, what worked for us and what seemed to work for everyone. So we came with those ideas firmly entrenched that this is the type of venue we want to make. We wanted it to be like Cheers but with bands. (Joel Morrison, interview)

Maintaining a sense of social responsibility amongst participants is beneficial for the venue in that it promotes mutual respect. This strengthens an idea of the venue as a distinct social space. A feeling of common ground permeates The Old Bar, as participants bond over their experience of the venue, the musical performances, and other identifying traits. This contributes to the venue’s vernacular culture (see Gallan and Gibson 2013; Gallan 2012; Shorthose 2004; Rahnema 1997) and cultural capital, as music scenes organise tastes or affinities as itineraries across venue spaces (Straw 2001, p. 254). Small live music venues therefore facilitate distinct music scenes that bleed into neighbouring venues, bars and house parties; reifying the tastes and affinities that make up their vernacular culture across the cultural field and social space of the local scene (discussed further in Chapter Five).
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The front bar is a focal point for sociality. This is particularly apparent at The Old Bar (see Figure 13), due to the small size and spatial confines of the bar:

[The Old Bar] is smaller and everyone’s sort of jammed in, especially on a busy night, [and] there’s only minimal places to sit and you end up talking to just everyone. So it’s quite a more sort of forced social interaction. Which works as well, and is good for the venue because everyone ends up knowing at least half the crowd by the end of the night, and then if someone fucks up someone will tell the staff before the staff find out, a lot of the time. So that’s good to know. (Joel Morrison, interview)

A tightly knit social situation benefits both the staff and patrons, as patrons are able to police each other, leaving staff free to administer the space. The front bar integrates the social experience of the bar into the total experience of the venue and is a microcosm of the larger social interface of the venue.

The small size of The Old Bar has an impact on the venue’s culture, as “[it is] a size that lends itself to being more homely and welcoming… that front bar sort of aspect is all sitting around the front bar, having a chat on a quiet night” (Claire Portek, interview). Portek posits the social environment of The Old Bar as an intimate one, facilitated by the smaller setting of the front bar itself. Small venues such as The Old Bar facilitate personal encounters between strangers, encouraging socializing and informal networking more readily than larger venues due to their intimate setting and lack of anonymity (Holt 2014, p. 24). Portek also stated that the owners of The Old Bar deliberately encourage the social atmosphere of the bar, stating that “I think it’s partially created by and fostered by the owners... I think it’s a conscious thing. I think it’s also the size, it’s a smaller venue” (Claire Portek, interview).
Figure 13 - The Old Bar: Front bar interior on a busy winter weeknight
Small venues such as The Old Bar encourage a consistent clientele. This is partly due to their localised nature, their ease of access in terms of cost and other factors (e.g. accessibility, geographic centrality, proximity to public transport etc.), as well as the social nature of the front bar itself. Participants become more familiar with the venue, its staff, and other musical acts, and thus feel welcomed and likely to return. This emphasises the intersection between the venue space as a cultural field and a social space, wherein sociality and spatiality inform one another and habitus-field congruence is reliant not only on an alignment between habitus and the field, but also the social space itself.

Myth-making around live music scenes is fundamental to their existence. Narratives, cultural memory, and ‘everyday’ vernacular culture play a role in this myth-making. These are perpetuated in a local context amongst social actors that become more familiar and at ease as their engagement with the scene progresses, inclining the field towards their habitus and vice versa (Butler 1999). This ‘feedback loop’ of participation, interaction and satisfaction is unique to the small venue experience, as it reinforces a culture of participation that is difficult to sense in the anonymous environment of larger concert venues.

The common experiences shared between participants in music scenes includes an emphasis on the ‘local’ aspects of the space (both in terms of the performers and the nature of the venue itself) and a lack of barriers (whether social, cultural or physical). However, each space, scene, and associated field has its own idiosyncrasies to be navigated. Small venues provide a sense of space and place for participants, a crucial factor for their success and a defining characteristic of the live music ecology. Front bar
culture plays an integral role in facilitating interactions and the generation of social capital between musicians, which also contributes to a sense of scene.

Along with their role as points of consumption, front bars are sites of social exchange. Bands are formed, relationships are sparked, and friendships are cemented. Dan McKay outlines the relevance of front bar culture to musicians:

Someone once said that they wanted to do a website that was basically like Frontbar.com which is like, “I’m looking for a drummer”; go to Frontbar.com, which is sort of how I guess like The Tote and The Old Bar work, it’s like “I’m looking for a drummer”, I’m like “Oh fuck, there’s this dude I saw the other night in this band, he was awesome” … that’s the appeal, just being connected in that way, it’s easy. (Dan McKay, interview)

McKay describes the ease with which musicians are able to form alliances in the setting of the front bar. This was echoed by music industry worker Bek Duke:

The Old Bar and The Tote especially, they have a front bar and that’s a social point for people. It’s a meeting place. So it’s not just the band room but it’s a part of the venue that people can just hang out and socialise. Whether they go in to see the band or not doesn’t matter, it’s a meeting point… (Bek Duke, interview)

The front bar provides the conditions in which social encounters occur more readily. Common ground, familiarity, and a shared sense of habitus contribute to both the narrative of these musicians’ lives and the live music scene as a whole.

Familiarity was a dominant theme throughout my fieldwork. Bec Reato stressed familiarity in terms of her ability to feel welcomed in a venue:

It’s the music, it’s the posters on the walls and it’s the staff behind the bar that are always choosing what is playing in the room, and you can ask them about it, and you talk about it, and you can sit up at the bar. Sitting up at the bar is a really important thing I reckon... at The Old Bar there’s not really anywhere, apart from the beer garden, to sit, unless you’re sitting up at the bar on a quiet night. (Bec Reato, interview)
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Reato emphasises the significance of the front bar, specifically in regards to her relationship with the bar’s staff. Music photographer and former bartender Elisa Bryant Jones described The Old Bar as “a second lounge room” (interview). Jo Gardiner also described her connection to The Old Bar and The Tote in deeply personal terms:

I remember - when you could smoke inside - sitting at the bar of The Tote with a beer on a Tuesday afternoon when it was tight-arse Tuesdays and just playing pool in the front bar, it just felt like home, like completely felt like home, and that’s what it’s like here [at The Old Bar] as well. Sitting at this table in the beer garden of The Old Bar or just sitting at the bar, I could play Uno in [the bar] and no-one bats an eyelid or they’re just happy for it to happen. So yeah, it is like a lounge room because we pretty much treat it like one. (Jo Gardiner, interview)

Gardiner emphasises the relaxed nature of these venues. Her attitude towards the space hinges on her ability to make herself feel ‘at home’. This emphasises the intersection between the venue as a field, its materiality, and its social space. Musician Sarah ‘Thomo’ Thompson also spoke of the casual nature of my case study venues:

Yeah, definitely spend a bit of time at The Tote as well. The same as The Old Bar, friends that work behind the bar helps and you can go in there if you’re just on your way home and you’re like “I feel like a beer.” You don’t have to call anyone; you can just stop in at either of those [venues] and someone you know will be there… So you can just stop and have a quick beer and then head on your way again. (Sarah Thompson, interview)

The informality of the front bar as an accessible social space that is connected to, but does not necessarily centre on the live music experience adds to the feeling of these venues as places to meet for a casual drink, share mutual interests, and discuss music and the local scene.

Respondents Tristen Harris and Jo Gardiner treat The Old Bar as their personal living room, having previously lived in the apartment block behind the bar. They are fixtures of the local small venue scene and had their
wedding ceremony in The Tote’s band room. Their presence in these bars is a familiar one and their story adds to an understanding of these spaces:

So we got married at The Tote, basically because I started going to The Tote when I was really young, and then I lived in the street behind The Tote for a long time, and I just had so many good nights there, especially in the beer garden. The band room [is important] because that’s why we’re there, but spending time with friends in the beer garden late at night drinking and smoking and having fun in my mid-20s, it’s just what I remembered most, and that’s the reason why I wanted to get married there; I just always loved that beer garden, and that venue in particular. And so when it was closing down I was devastated because I’d always had the plan, and then it reopened and I got to do it, in the end, and it was everything I wanted it to be... There is a definite scene. Like you see all the same people at the gigs, and it’s just like a sense of community. (Jo Gardiner, regular/ DJ, interview)

Participants add to the social fabric of these venues, giving the music scenes that inhabit them a sense of place. The personal histories, shared memories and events that occur in a venue culminate in a collective knowledge of the space; an embodied cultural capital. This process is what turns an average bar into a beloved space of community practice.

Both Joel Morrison and ‘Snoop’ Mitchell discussed a sense of collective ownership over each venue, which Mitchell linked to the role of the front bar as a social space:

I think if neither venue had a front bar, then we wouldn’t have the feeling that’s around this place, so there wouldn’t be this sense of people feeling an ownership for The Tote or wanting to come back here on a regular basis if the front bar wasn’t there I think that helps foster that sense of community, because drinking in the same space as people, even if you’ve never met them before, seeing the same people, you’re going to talk to that person. (‘Snoop’ Mitchell, interview)

Mitchell compares the front bar to the band room, stating that the venue would be “kind of just weird” without the front bar (interview). He states that The Tote’s front bar helps to “foster that sense of community” (interview). This inclines the field of the venue towards its participants’
habitus, and emphasises the importance of a public space (i.e. the front bar) where people can congregate and socialise. As Morrison stated, “[the] front bar helps a lot [in] having a social scene... There’s somewhere to just sit down and have a drink and a chat instead of just watching the bands” (Joel Morrison, interview). The front bar is a meeting place for scene participants. It is therefore an inherently public space, which lends itself to an open, informal, and multi-faceted dialogue that contributes to the culture of small live music venues and the continued generation of social capital. Despite this, factors of habitus, social and cultural capital influence who can participate and how they participate, as not everyone can access these spaces. Much of a live music venue’s front bar ‘vibe’ is influenced by its relationship with the corresponding band room.

The Band Room

Band rooms are performance spaces and provide a stage for musical practices that involve a variety of interactions unique to live performance. They are also spaces where audiences engage with and participate in live performances, and the role of the audience—how they respond to and interact with the performer—shapes notions of the venue space and its position in the live music ecology.

A venue’s band room is a space of performance, celebration, consumption, reverence, and revelry. Many of my respondents framed it is a discrete space of its own, separate from what occurs throughout the rest of the venue:

I went to The Tote the other night and I was in the front bar talking to people and I was like, “Oh, I just want there to be a band on so I don’t have to talk to anyone.” And then went into the band room. I knew a lot of people in the front bar, there [was] a lot going on and it was really,
really social. But then once [the band] Nation Blue started playing, I just got to stand and watch and not actually be switched on, because during the day, part of my job is being really chatty and full on, really social. (Bec Reato, interview)

Reato positions the band room of The Tote as a space of meditation, wherein she is able to enjoy the bands without social pressure. However, this experience becomes muddied if we are to situate it in the spatial environment of The Old Bar, which offers little separation between the front bar and band room. As The Old Bar’s band room is situated immediately next to the venue’s front bar (see Figure 7), there is a spatial overlap between these two areas. We must therefore consider both, framing the discourse in holistic terms that takes in all aspects of the venue space and considers how decisions pertaining to the operation of the band room indirectly affect the venue as a social space.

Bands cite the intimate setting of The Old Bar as a space that is exciting to play:

It’s much more intimate. There can be some big bands that play, like say when The Meanies play here it’s absolutely intense. They never play shows this small anymore on a stage this small… So it’s good for bands to come back to little grassroots rooms and just play right there and face the crowd. All those things help make it reputable and a great gig. (Joel Morrison, interview)

The informal nature of The Old Bar removes much of the spectacle of performance. The stage is relatively low, with musicians only a few feet higher than the audience (see Figure 3). On a busy night sight-lines are limited, adding to the intimate feel of the band room. Audiences and performers occupy a similar social space at The Old Bar, heightening the authenticity of the musical experience. As Shuker states, “[f ]or many critics, fans and musicians, there is a perceived hierarchy of live performances, with a marked tendency to equate the audiences’ physical proximity to the actual ‘performance’ and intimacy with the performer(s) with a more authentic and
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satisfying musical experience” (2012, p. 201). Intimacy is emphasised in spaces like The Old Bar. However, this sits in contrast to The Tote, where the stage is higher and large stacks of speakers create an imposing feeling to the stage (see Figure 4).

The Old Bar’s owner Liam Matthews discussed the appeal of having a band room that spills into the front bar:

I’d say a quarter of the people that are here every Friday night have just paid the entry fee to come in to be here and they either sit out the back or they discover new bands or something like that, which is something that I’ve always loved about this place and I love it being all inclusive, not having a separated band room. The bands get to maybe win a few people over and it just creates a whole environment here. (Liam Matthews, interview)

Although The Old Bar’s front bar is slightly separated from its band room via a brick archway, the two spaces are effectively the same, and one must walk through the band room if one wants access to the venue’s other spaces (see Figure 7). Nick Finch, a long-time manager at The Old Bar and prominent musician described the layout of the venue:

It’s that perfect size, you know the stage isn’t too high, so you can play a gig you can have 30 people in there and have a really good vibe, and the band feeds off the energy of the audience… There are no tables in there, there’s nowhere to fucking sit if you go to The Old Bar because they want to keep the band room focused on bands, without having tables all over the place. (Nick Finch, interview)

Here, spatiality informs sociality, which in turn shapes the field and habitus of those that engage with the space. This was reflected in my interviews with owners Liam Matthews and Joel Morrison. While ‘the bands’ serve as the main focus, the small size of the band room means that the ‘vibe’ is intimate and relaxed. This is in contrast to The Tote, which is larger, more spread-out, and features a main band-room that is separate from the rest of the venue. This separation affects perceptions of the live music experience, for both musicians and the audience.
Rich Stanley, booking agent at The Tote and member of former Brisbane band The Onyas discussed the status and cultural capital associated with his venue:

If a band could headline at The Tote on a Friday night I think they would be like, “We’ve made it.” I have to remember that… it particularly came into mind when Wet Lips had a thing on, they were putting a bunch of their girl bands on upstairs on a Friday night, and I had a gig fall through downstairs and so about a month out, instead of me trying to scramble a half decent gig a month out I said to them, “Do you just want to move downstairs, add a couple of extra bands and see how you go?”… it was the biggest fucking deal for all of them and I hadn’t realised that. (Rich Stanley, interview)

Stanley identifies and emphasises the cultural capital connected to The Tote’s main band room. A well-equipped space in terms of production values, The Tote’s band room also holds a certain amount of status and cultural capital due to the venue’s iconic history. This history has been affirmed in media narratives, vernacular culture, and personal accounts:

The Tote, because of the history it’s had and has still got, it’s a big thing for bands to play their first gig. You might have played 10 or 15 gigs around town, but when you play your first gig at The Tote, it’s still a big thing… There’s just a certain feeling about it. A feeling of there’s substance to what you’re doing… It’s kind of a graduation almost (‘Snoop’ Mitchell, interview)

This emphasises the cultural capital associated with The Tote and the venue’s status in the live music ecology of Melbourne.

The Tote has been heavily affected by disparate actors operating outside of the local live music scene. The events that led to The Tote’s closure were a product of conflicting interests in Melbourne’s live music ecology, and the effects of these events are symbolic of The Tote’s position in this ecology. In this scenario, The Tote was already in a precarious financial situation due to a combination of pre-existing factors, some of

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7 Wet Lips are a local punk trio.
these management-related, others environmental. The liquor licensing laws brought into effect in Victoria at the time—late 2009/early 2010—in response to alcohol-related violence at late-night ‘high-risk’ venues required extra security guards be posted at venues that had a late-night licence and hosted live music. The extra costs incurred by these types of venues as a result of this legislation meant that a variety of venues across Victoria were placed in financial strife. As a result, given its already precarious financial position, The Tote was forced to close. This is a demonstrable case of ‘outsider’ policymakers having a substantial effect on the live music ecology, despite not being involved in related local music scenes, either directly or indirectly. However, due to advocacy groups such as SLAM and political action that occurred as a result, The Tote later reopened, albeit under new management. The venue’s new owners have capitalised on this conflict and eventual triumph, releasing a run of merchandise with the slogan “This is The Tote. Never Say Die!” emblazoned on it to celebrate “30 Years of Rock’N’Roll, 1981-2011” (see Figure 14), an interesting example of cultural capital transformed into economic capital and the co-option of symbolic value for financial gain. The role of social and cultural capital is explored further in the following section.
Figure 14 - “This IS The Tote: Never Say Die!” merchandise
The Booking Agent

A major concern in any account of live music ecologies are the disparate yet interdependent social actors that effect and influence the sustainability of live music scenes and the venues that house them. In the following section I analyse the role of venue booking agents, entrenched insiders that have a profound influence over the social space of each venue. This influence is mobilised via their power and associated types of capital within the curation and coordination of a venue’s nightly or regular lineups.

The role of the booking agent is usually either a professional or semi-professional one. Booking agents are either hired by the venue as in-house employees, outsourced to professional concert promoters’—who might handle a number of venues across their books—or are owners or part-owners in the venue business. The duties of the booking agent is to liaise with musicians’, their management or tour promoters (also often called ‘booking agents’ who advocate on behalf of bands and musicians rather than venues) to coordinate the live music event. The booking agent makes decisions around which bands should play on which night of the week, along with which bands or musicians are selected to support or open for a headlining act. This group of bands or musicians—those that are consecutively booked at a venue on the same night, or across a similar period of time—is referred to as the ‘lineup’.

Venue booking agents also handle decisions around performance fees and monetary guarantees on behalf of the venue, and therefore have significant influence over the allocation of economic capital. Many booking agents are ‘known’ in local music scenes, as part of their job means wielding a significant amount of social, cultural, symbolic and ultimately economic capital. They therefore engage with both local and translocal music scenes.
whilst further liaising with outside agents more commonly associated with
the live music ecology, interacting with multiple, disparate yet interdependent
actors to ensure the live music event goes ahead (Behr et al 2016).

Joel Morrison is the booking agent of The Old Bar and is also a part-
owner in the venue business. Rich Stanley is the booking agent of The Tote,
and is employed by the venue on a full-time basis to represent the venue and
its booking needs. Booking agents curate venue spaces to align with the field
of the local music scene, and the needs and social space of the venue as a
small business and social hub. Their tastes influence the space, yet they are
hired on the basis of their pre-existing cultural capital, the habitus they bring
to the role, and the social capital they maintain throughout the local music
scene. The role of the booking agent is therefore pivotal to the venue’s status
in the live music ecology, as their curatorship has a significant impact on the
venue’s success and ongoing sustainability.

Booking agents act as arbiters of taste and cultural capital. They have
great influence over venue spaces as ‘cultural fields’. In this context, “[f]ields
overlap and exist at various levels, with smaller fields (e.g. family) nested in
larger fields (e.g. educational field, economic field)” (Edgerton and Roberts
2014, p. 195). Therefore, we can consider the local music scenes of
Melbourne’s inner-north as one of many fields, or focus on each venue and
the discrete social spaces therein.

The status of booking agents in the live music ecology is derived from
the interrelation of their habitus with the capital they mobilise in the field of
the local music scene(s) (Edgerton and Roberts 2014, p. 195). Booking
agents hold positions of considerable social, cultural and symbolic capital
amongst music scene participants. Their gatekeeping practices delineate a
sense of scene around the venue space, encouraging participants to invest
meaning in the venue’s inherent field and the social pathways that constitute it (Gallan 2012, p. 36). Booking agents negotiate the terms of the venue as a field and therefore which participant’s the field inclines towards.

It is worth considering Frith’s materialist approach to live music here, which asks that if “live music takes as its basis that a music event is constructed through a complex of socio-historical economic and ideological forces, just like a music work”, then “from a sociological perspective there has to be some sort of agreement among all the social actors involved in a musical event as to what the event entails (in terms of behaviour) and means” (Frith 2012). The booking agent is fundamental to this event in that they curate, organise, and ensure that the event goes ahead. Although they are not always the catalyst, they are instrumental. Venue booking agents are essential to the live music ecology and hold an influential position within it, as well as surrounding scenes.

I have interviewed the booking agents of my case study venues so as to provide an accurate representation of their role in the management of each venue and their impact on the social and cultural processes that take place in these spaces. Each has a specific function in the broader live music ecology and the status of each venue in the ecology. They are also responsible for a microcosm of the ecology as represented in the venue’s ‘field’. This microcosm relies on the interdependence between staff, musicians, other venue workers and the surrounding live music scene. Thus successful curation of the venue space by each booking agent impacts the live music ecology directly.

The role of a venue’s booking agent is one of a curator, tastemaker, businessman, and glad-hander. Booking agents are cultural intermediaries, who curate venue spaces. They trade in social and cultural capital, mobilising
and exchanging these in order to co-ordinate the live music event and generate a flow of revenue into the venue space. They are also gatekeepers; “[i]ntermediaries [that] use cultural knowledge to influence consumer behaviour and control ‘taste’ and ‘style’, occupying authoritative positions between production and consumption spheres” (Gallan 2012, p. 39).

Booking agents are pivotal in developing a sense of inclusivity (and often exclusivity), self-sufficiency, and vibrancy in the venue spaces that they administer “by generating and then consistently implementing a strict philosophy on what music and which bands perform…” (Gallan 2012, p. 35). Throughout his research, Gallan stated that local bands who held strong connections—social capital—with The Oxford Tavern were often favoured over better known or more lucrative bands (2012). Thus the role of the booking agent hinges on social and cultural capital, which is heavily influenced by their habitus. This strongly affects the venue as a cultural field, coding and influencing the space. Joel Morrison outlined the ways in which he navigates the cultural field of The Old Bar:

> It’s also wrapped up in being the venue owner as well as the band booker, where you’ve got to create allegiances… Like where a band will make it feel like their own home and then if they get bigger then they can always come back and it’s like a grass roots, building from the bottom sort of thing. And if they feel a bit of ownership of the venue then they’re always going to help you out later on down the track when they’re a lot bigger. (Joel Morrison, interview)

Morrison’s role as a venue owner informs his practice as a booking agent, and his role as a booking agent further informs his practice as a musician (Joel Morrison, interview). The cultural field of the venue is first and foremost in his decision-making processes, as is instilling a sense of ownership in the bands, emphasising the co-constitution of their habitus in the field of the venue. This contributes to the idea of a venue-specific field
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and affirms the venue’s place in the live music ecology, as the bookings agents’ power over the space aligns the venue with a certain aesthetic and network of bands/musicians.

Many of the musicians interviewed discussed the role of small venues in creating a social space for them. Nick Finch discussed the importance of The Old Bar in providing his former band Graveyard Train with a hub in Melbourne’s inner-north during the early 2010s:

I think at the time in Collingwood and Fitzroy there was, I mean it’s kind of a musical hub, especially at that time, when Graveyard Train was starting, there was a real kind of, old country scene thing happening. It seemed to focus on the Old Bar, like all the old country bands were playing at The Old Bar. We were just one of those bands. I guess Joel [Morrison], the band booker, really kind of picked up on that scene and it just seemed like The Old Bar was the kind of epicentre of that kind of folk country, old country thing that was happening five years ago in Melbourne. (Nick Finch, interview)

Morrison’s ability to create a ‘hub’ for these bands is indicative of the role of booking agents in the live music ecology. By giving musicians space to perform and hone their craft these acts were integrated into the venue culture and local music scene around it. Many of the bands that came through The Old Bar in the late 2000s and early 2010s went on to have successful careers in the Australian music industry, a testament to The Old Bar as a platform for emerging acts and a launching pad towards bigger stages. Former bar manager and musician Adam Curley echoed this point:

Well, I work at The Old Bar so I know which bands play here all the time and I do probably associate a few bands with The Old Bar… There seems to have been a time when [the owners] were nurturing a group of Melbourne bands who have since gone on to be a bit too big to play at The Old Bar (Adam Curley, interview)

This nurturing was a deliberate move by The Old Bar’s owners and its booking agent Joel Morrison, and resulted in the establishment of a distinct scene that revolved around the venue for a moment in time and place. Much
of this was premised on Morrison’s social and cultural capital and his ability to mobilise these in curating live music events at The Old Bar.

The individual cultural capital held by each booking agent is integral to their curation of the venue space. Each agent has distinct tastes and a pre-existing knowledge of the local music scene that informs their booking policies. Each venue is therefore a reflection of its booking agent’s own tastes and cultural capital, mitigated by a need to get people through the door; the conversion of social and cultural capital into economic capital. This can be seen in the way specific booking agents tastes seem to fit with each venue space:

I think it’s dominated by whoever's booking it I guess. The venue chooses that booker based on what they’ve already had working for them. Rich [Stanley] booking The Tote isn’t a coincidence. They figure his taste suits that venue. George [Hyde] booking The Spotted Mallard8, he can get some sort of gypsy band one night and then a loud surf rock band the next night. It depends on the venue. (Chris Drane, interview)

The cultural capital of each booking agent suffuses the venue space, imbuing it with an aesthetic and shaping its position in the scene and its status in the live music ecology. This is indicative of how the ecology and scene intersect. The booking agent’s habitus influences the space in a particular way. This influences the venues’ position in the live music ecology, attracting certain scenes and their participants. This is habitus-field congruence on a mass scale. However, what scene does not account for is how the built environment of the venue, its location in the cityscape, and how social actors that are removed from the scene (e.g. developers, the police, policymakers, bureaucrats etc.) affect its ongoing sustainability. This is the advantage of live music ecology as a theoretical framework.

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8 The Spotted Mallard is a live music and dining venue in Brunswick, featuring a seated show and a wide variety of musical genres.
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The tacit knowledge of promoters informs each venue space. Rich Stanley made a point of dismissing ‘careerist’ bands, emphasising the Bourdieusian notion of disinterest. Informality was preferred in correspondence between himself and artists:

I think it’s important to keep it organised but informal and friendly. I really have an aversion to bands who start off as if they want to be big bands, like careerist professional bands... It’s like you know they suck, you know they’re going to be awful and it doesn’t really matter what they sound like, you know they just want Triple J\(^9\) airplay or something like that and you just have to avoid that shit. The other way you can screen bands is if they send you BandCamp and SoundCloud links they’re probably going to be cool, but if they send you ReverbNation links just delete it. (Rich Stanley, interview

Stanley ascribes cultural capital to certain websites that he deems more authentic. He also asserts a distinction between bands that are self-managed DIY ventures and those that have a manager, making clear that such a position is linked to careerist ambitions and an overt desire for economic capital.

Assumed notions of authenticity influence the way Stanley conducts himself as a booking agent. His role is premised on his ability to manufacture an ‘authentic’ cultural experience (Grazian 2004, pp. 138-139) with the assistance of others. Stanley’s curation of the space is delimited by what he assumes to be authentic, which is directly related to his habitus and cultural capital. We can therefore frame each venue’s status as largely, but not wholly, a product of the booking agent’s habitus and symbolic capital as well as their habitus-field congruence manifested through curation of the space. Further, their social and cultural capital is repeatedly called upon to book, organise, and finalise live music events, assuring the venue’s status.

\(^9\) Triple J is an Australian national radio station and public youth broadcaster.
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Stanley privileges cultural capital over a want of economic capital. Those bands that prioritise credibility, artistic integrity, and authenticity in the form of DIY practices and autonomy are given precedence over ‘careerist’ bands. Further to this, it is useful to consider the live music ecology in terms of the relationship between economic, cultural, and social capital. In the live music ecology of Melbourne’s inner-north, cultural capital is often more valuable than economic capital. Certainly it is more abundant, and with a general scarcity of economic capital across the local music sector, it is also more easily traded. Social capital is also a large contributor to the everyday functioning of the live music ecology, and may be exchanged for economic capital when the latter is particularly scarce.

Booking agents correspond and coordinate with a vast number of diverse social actors to ensure that a gig goes ahead:

There’ll be a band I’m not really that interested in but I really like the person, and that’s where the social side of it’s more important... It comes back to that cultural thing we were talking about, if I think they’re well intentioned and I like the way they go about their footy\textsuperscript{10} I’m into it and that’s really one of my main driving things is I want to find people like that and help them do what they want to do. (Rich Stanley, interview)

The emphasis on ‘good intentions’ demonstrates the role that social capital plays in the ongoing sustainability of the live music ecology. Stanley prefers to work with bands that “go about their footy” in a way in he likes, emphasising mutual respect. His presence at local gigs is noteworthy, a point echoed by Lara Soulio:

I think because the owners and the bookers do go to the bands and go to other venues... They know the bands they’re booking. Everyone’s sort of involved in some way, whether it’s art or music or building something for the bar. People are multi-skilled and it is a community because of that, and therefore it becomes a social environment. (Lara Soulio)

\textsuperscript{10} ‘Go about their footy’ is a local colloquialism for ‘going about their business’, relating to how they conduct themselves personally.
Chapter 4 - Ecology

Soulio, interview)

Engagement with the scene is emphasised and the way such engagement feeds into the live music ecology is a by-product of interdependence between disparate social agents. Without this, the venues would not be able to sustain themselves as the kind of competition-based business practices inherent in neoliberal capitalist economics would undermine the live music ecology that this culture relies on. A mutually beneficial community arises out of this, wherein venues and scene participants support each other across the live music ecology. This aligns closely with earlier definitions of music scenes, with the exception that the live music ecology takes the actions of those agents operating outside of the scene and the material concerns of live music venues into account, as well as how these interdependent factors contribute to an ongoing live music culture.

Earlier in this section I discussed the way in which The Old Bar functioned as a social hub for a distinct group of musicians in the early 2010s. This occurred at a discrete time in the venue’s history. In comparison, The Tote is not as closely aligned with a distinct period of time, or group of bands. This is because it has functioned as a popular live music venue for over 30 years. In this time, The Tote has gone through a number of changes, many of which have been the result of different owners, management, and booking agents. It has been at the centre of multiple scenes and ‘moments’ in Melbourne’s live music history, maintaining an ongoing place in the city’s live music ecology as a headline space for local, Australian, and international acts:

I kind of feel like the Tote is timeless with its reputation. A lot of other venues come and go in terms of their bookings and the kind of bands they attract… Whereas the Tote will never lose that reputation for booking a certain kind of band or just good bands or attracting a certain type of crowd. That will never go away from the Tote because of its legacy of nurturing that scene. I suppose its history does play quite a role in that community. (Adam Curley, interview)
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History and legacy coalesce in the material environment of The Tote, a space that is both a quasi-museum of local rock history and a vibrant, performance space for emerging forms of underground and alternative Australian music.

Conclusion

This chapter discussed and analysed the social dynamics and visual aesthetics of The Old Bar and The Tote, observing each venues’ position in the local live music ecology. Drawing on participant interviews, this chapter has demonstrated how the materiality of these venues influence how participants engage with these spaces, the impact of ‘outsider’ agents and negotiations with and between them, and how these factors coalesce and affect the music scenes housed within them. Examples are given and a discussion of the relationship and interdependence between the band room and front bar are provided.

Throughout this chapter I have defined the live music ecology as it relates to my case study venues, drawing on the literature. I have outlined how small venues fit in the live music ecology and how the ecology is built upon these small venue spaces, which acts as the grassroots for a larger value chain of live music production, spanning from the pub to the stadium (Behr, Brennan, and Cloonan 2014). My definition of the live music ecology hinges on the materiality of the venue spaces themselves, the social actors who organise, impact, and are responsible for the live music event, as well as those operating outside the local music scene yet still affect, hinder and delimit it, and finally the resulting live music culture that continues to sustain and simultaneously relies on these spaces for its articulation.

Using Bourdieu’s theories of capital and habitus, I discussed how social and cultural capital are utilised by booking agents to organise and promote
live music events. An understanding of how these events are organised is integral to the live music ecology, as it is the live music event that the ecology relies on and articulates itself around. I also discussed how the ecology and local music scenes intersect in the social space of small venues, which act as both launching pads for artists and social hubs for local music scenes. In comparing my two case study venues, I discussed how The Old Bar performs a similar but smaller role to that of The Tote in terms of the live music ecology. Interview participants stated a clear relationship between the two venues, as if each were extensions of the other. This relationship is evident in the way these venues share staff, bands, and audiences, occupying similar roles in the broader cultural field of the live music ecology.

Finally, booking agents affect venue spaces through their curation of live music events, influencing the status of these venues in the ecology. These events are dependent on the materiality of venue spaces, as bands choose where they perform based on the size of the room, the quality of the sound, and other material factors. Scene participants—musicians, sound engineers, venue staff, booking agents—work together to collaborate on the live music event, ensuring its organisation, promotion, and success through their collective efforts. However, other social agents outside of the local music scene also affect the live music ecology. Policymakers, police, and security all operate on the peripheries of music scenes yet still have a dramatic effect on their sustainability as cultural forms. The following chapter will take a close look at the local music scenes that inhabit The Old Bar and The Tote, identifying the staff, musicians, and other key participants that influence these social spaces.
Chapter 5 – The Local Scene and its Participants

This chapter draws on the key term of ‘scene’ to analyse, categorise, and map the different types of social actors exercising agency throughout the local music scene of Melbourne’s inner-north. Scenes articulate a ‘moment’ in the musical life of a city and reify the tastes and affinities associated with a group in a specific time and place. They are fluid yet relatively stable conglomerates that group together around specific socio-cultural events (i.e. gigs), participating in them on both an individual and collective level. In order to assess the social and cultural value of The Old Bar and The Tote, as per my research question, we need to examine the local music scene and its participants, specifically what kinds of value they derive from these spaces and, also, what kinds of value they contribute to the live music ecology.

Here, I examine the distinct roles of scene participants as they relate to the small venues of The Tote and The Old Bar. Each participant in a local music scene performs social and/or professional roles that can be separated into a number of categories, identified here as ‘security’, ‘door staff’, ‘bar staff and shift managers’, ‘musicians’, and ‘live music audiences’. Other participants that play a more pivotal role in the live music ecology (venue booking agents, management, venue owners etc.) have already been discussed in the previous chapter (Chapter Four). However, I refer to a number of them here in order to further illustrate the local music scene of Melbourne’s inner-north. Separating the roles of scene participants into categories helps to make clear the diversity of participants cooperating and interacting in the local music scene that The Old Bar and The Tote
accommodate. As discussed in the previous two chapters, these venues are positioned in a similar social space and fulfil similar functions in the local music scene. By unpacking the roles of scene participants, this chapter demonstrates how they contribute to the field of the local music scene and how each venue acts as a social hub for these participants, forming a scene. An understanding of local music scenes, in turn, reveals the role of space and place, social and cultural capital and their conversion, as well as how this live music scene intersects with the live music ecology.

**Security**

Security staff are the first to greet potential patrons and thus have a great deal of influence over the space (van Liempt and van Aalst 2016, p. 1257). However, most security staff in Melbourne are hired through external security agencies. Therefore, security staff are not technically venue staff, but contracted workers hired for the purposes of keeping the venue, its staff and patrons, safe. This role has expanded in recent years to include an expectation that bouncers act as ‘hosts’ and “be nice” (Lister et al., 2001).

However, this becomes problematic when security staff are unfamiliar with the idiosyncrasies of a space and its associated scene, as they often lack a similar habitus to that of regular scene participants. Another duty of security staff is to select the clientele depending on venue preferences of ambience, appearance, and taste (van Liempt and van Aalst 2016, p. 1257). This directly relates to notions of habitus, and social and cultural capital. Judging by appearances, security staff are only able to tell if a potential participant fits the characteristics desired by the venue through visual signifiers—clothing, hairstyle, body language—all examples of embodied cultural capital. Further, if the patron is known to security staff, then social capital is also used to gain
entry to the venue. Security staff are therefore gatekeepers of small venue spaces.

Local musician and music industry professional Chris Drane outlined the impact that security staff have on the small venue experience stating, “[s]ecurity makes a big difference… If a security guard’s nice to you when you’re walking in the door, that’s going to go a long way” (Chris Drane, interview). A positive experience of security staff can affect perceptions of the venue. Participants that feel welcomed into a venue are more inclined to return. On the other hand, a negative experience might discourage punters:

If you’re going to the Penny Black1 because your mate’s band is playing and you feel like you should go, and you walk in the door, and the security guards make you queue up. You’re the only person there, but they’re like, “Oi, get behind the rope.” You’re like, “Alright.” You’ve got to walk around and go behind the rope and then they ask you what you’re doing there tonight and want to see your ID, like really intimidating, you’re like, “I’m just going to get a beer, watch this band, and get the hell out of here”. Because straight away, your first impression is, this place doesn’t want me here. I don’t want to spend any money here. (Chris Drane, interview).

Drane’s account reflects previous research, in that “intimidating and overly aggressive security undermines consumer confidence and thus profit margins” (van Liempt and van Aalst 2016, p. 1255).

As the systems that govern security staff are largely external, they are therefore answerable, but not entirely duty-bound, to the venue space. Although they have a certain responsibility to the safety of the space and its patrons, security staff are under little formal obligation to represent the social practice or cultural standing of the venue beyond their basic duties as guard personnel. Security guards sit apart from local music scenes yet are integral in their gatekeeping. Bouncers also “do the majority of the ‘hands-on’ policing, or what is sometimes called ‘the dirty job’. They often act before the police

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1 The Penny Black is a live music venue in Melbourne’s northern suburb of Brunswick.
“arrive on the scene” (van Liempt and van Aalst 2016, p. 1255). This places them more accurately in the wide-ranging group of disparate yet interdependent social actors that influence live music scenes yet don’t necessarily participate in them; a group accounted for within a theory of the live music ecology (Behr et al 2016). Bouncers work with the police, although this relationship is cautious and their powers are considerably more restricted, both spatially and in terms of the force they can exercise. Within their duties “bouncers are allowed to remove a person from the private space into the public and use ‘reasonable’ force to do so, but they are not allowed to arrest anyone and they have no legal responsibility to police public spaces” (van Liempt and van Aalst 2016, p. 1257).

Security staff are intrinsically connected to the venue space and their influence over the social and cultural value of small venues must be considered. However, the model of hiring security guards through external agencies often results in inept or unreliable guards:

[It]’s really important to treat the locals and musicians with respect, because they’re the ones that will have your back if anything goes down. And that’s happened multiple times at The Tote where security guards have been shit. Like not the ones we have now, but we just had another company where they were just hopeless. (Therese Martschinke, interview)

This speaks to ideas of belonging, allegiance, and habitus. The Tote’s regular patrons are more emotionally invested in the space and externally hired security guards might not identify with music venues to the same extent, as their employment is often peripheral and short-term.

The presence of consistent, welcoming, and friendly security staff at venues such as The Old Bar—as emphasised in my fieldwork interviews—is a point of distinction, and one that contributes to their standing as welcoming spaces of sociality, play, and belonging. Indeed, “[i]t is a
misconception to think that bouncers are completely lacking in public responsibility” (van Liempt and van Aalst 2016, p. 1258). Nevertheless, a certain level of cultural and social capital is needed before a warm welcome is granted to scene participants by security staff. Engagement on a professional level—as bar staff, audio engineers, or as a musician—is key here, as security are more likely to acknowledge and aid other venue workers that they share a sense of habitus with. However, this habitus is not often shared between security staff and other participants, as guards are not often music scene participants themselves. They have an impact on the scene without being active participants, positioning them more accurately in the live music ecology than the scene itself.

Katie Drane, a regular at The Old Bar and bartender at The Tote mentioned the sense of social capital needed to establish working relationships with security staff in our fieldwork interview:

You know the security guards, all the bartenders have your back, and there’s no dickheads. The no dickhead policy... If I didn’t work at The Tote I’d feel safer here [at The Old Bar], and even sometimes do feel safer here, but now I know the security guards at The Tote, I know them all. (Katie Drane, interview)

Drane emphasises the importance of familiarity with security guards. This was echoed by Old Bar manager Dan McKay, who stated “[w]ell, I know a lot of the staff, or the security, or the regulars in each pub” (interview). The social capital needed to establish a connection with security is one that is usually reserved for venue staff. The comments above were made by insider participants who, as venue managers, security are often answerable to.

Several female respondents mentioned sexist encounters with guards:

Oh once I had a security guard - not at these two venues you’re focussing on - ask me what I’m doing behind the desk. But that would happen to anyone. Maybe it’s happened from punters before at Old Bar, like drunk punters telling me how to do my job, but that’s usually
people who are there at 12:30 and don’t usually watch bands there or haven’t been there before; it’s not part of the group of people that are there usually. (Lara Soulio, interview)

Soulio takes steps to distance security guards from the regular music scene participants associated with my case study venues. There is a partitioning of social space apparent here. Security guards were often framed as outsiders by my interview participants, as though they lacked the relevant social and cultural capital for the field of the local music scene. Adding to this, the occasional insinuation of incompetence by security staff further undermined female bar staff’s confidence in them:

It’s definitely harder, that’s for sure. I think when you tell a security guard that someone’s done something, they think you’re overreacting a lot of the time, which sucks. (Katie Drane, interview)

Being ignored or not taken seriously by bouncers is a common complaint amongst female patrons and bar staff. Previous research into nightlife spaces found that “at least one fight… occurred after bouncers failed to address complaints by females regarding unwanted sexual contact, leaving it up to male companions of these females to resolve these situations, usually in a violent manner” (Homel and Clark 1994, in Roberts 2009, p. 60). That security guards are often outsiders amongst local music scenes amplifies this problem, as a misalignment of habitus heightens distrust.

At The Tote, the involvement of security staff is primarily considered a last resort by management and staff:

I guess the only time where we have issues is sometimes you do get the odd one who kind of sneaks through who doesn’t really know where they are… The feeling of The Tote is that you can almost rely on the punters to kind of semi deal with it before you realise it’s a problem. We kind of want to have a ‘mob rule’ or ‘let the lunatics run the asylum’, where people feel a sense of ownership. (‘Snoop’ Mitchell, interview)

Mitchell assumes that a sense of collective ownership will result in a self-policing of the space, and that security should only step in when ‘outsiders’
cause trouble. However, this reaffirms the idea that those lacking appropriate habitus are the problem, emphasising the notion that only those with relevant cultural capital and tacit knowledge really belong at The Tote. Habitus and an investment in cultural capital are what contributes to this sense of collective ownership, and this relates to issues of gatekeeping.

Cultural and social capital have a large influence over venue spaces and the overall social space of local music scenes. As security guards perform gatekeeping roles, they often make judgement calls based on a participant’s stock of social and cultural capital. However, when you have a small number of gatekeepers with a vast amount of influence over access, this can quickly code the space in specific ways. Indeed, “[s]everal studies have suggested that bouncers sometimes deny entry to, or discriminate against, ethnic-minority youth” (Measham and Hadfield 2009; Boogaarts de Bruin 2011, in van Liempt and van Aalst 2016, p. 1252). This can have a substantial impact on spaces that are already coded as white due to the rockist nature of Melbourne’s live music venues and the Anglo-centricity of local music scenes in Australia.

**Door Staff**

The role of door staff is primarily to take ticket fees from patrons as they enter the venue, stamping gig-goers to allow exit and re-entry. Unlike security, door staff are often closely aligned with the venue and its scene, and fit more readily with the cultural codes of the space, reinforcing its norms and social standards. This is because door staff are selected by management and are hired directly by the venue, as opposed to security who are hired through external firms and contracted to the venue temporarily. Door staff are also usually invested in the scene somehow, either as musicians
themselves or active participants. However, due to their semi-professional role as door staff they act as another type of gatekeeper, distinguishing patrons there to participate in the live music experience from those there primarily to socialise. Door staff are also privy to insider knowledge of the scene and often possess relevant cultural and social capital.

Permanent door staff at The Old Bar often allow many of the more active local scene participants free entry to the space as recompense for their ongoing support. This is social capital traded in place of economic capital. Such liberties are also extended to those participants there to socialise rather than engage with the live performance. This codes the door fee as directly related to the live music experience. However, the role of time and space is significant here as well, as different venues place door staff at differing points throughout the venue at different times. Much of the gatekeeping role of door staff has to do with the placement of the door within the actual venue space itself.

The Old Bar and The Tote have distinct door policies. The Old Bar places door staff at the entry point of the venue half an hour before the first band is due to start. This means that anyone in the venue prior to this can stay and watch the bands for free, provided they don’t leave and attempt to return. It is explicit then that anyone entering the venue after this time is financially supporting the bands. Access to the front bar is obtained only through the main entry point, which is also next to the venue’s band room (see Figure 7). One cannot simply loiter in the front bar without directly or indirectly engaging with the performance. Door staff at The Tote are placed differently. The main band room at the back of the venue has a door charge, as does the upstairs band room. However, access to the front bar is generally free. The front bar is therefore an area removed from the live music
experience where patrons can drink, socialise, play pool and watch football on the television without having to pay entry. This separates the front bar both financially and spatially from the rest of the venue.

Joel Morrison of The Old Bar stated that having a paid point of entry at the front door of the venue was a conscious choice in favour of the musicians (interview). By placing the door charge—from which payment for the bands is taken—at the primary and only point of entry for the venue, the Old Bar’s emphasis on live music is spatially embodied in the presence of the door staff. This ensures that those entering the venue when the door is on/active (i.e. while the bands are performing) are at least implicitly participating in the live music experience. Those averse to the live music experience would therefore be less likely to enter the venue as they must first endorse the activity financially. This is because “The Old Bar charge entry at the front door, so that weeds out all the people that are just there to get wasted” (Katie Harrigan, interview). The connection between the cultural value of the live music experience and the economic capital exchanged at the door is clear.

The contradiction inherent in allowing certain patrons free entry while also stating that “we want to get the bands as much money as possible” (Joel Morrison, interview) reveals the two parallel motives that classify The Old Bar as a venue space. Although The Old Bar is a live music venue that hosts original bands most nights of the week, much of the scene that congregates around it are there just to be there. The owners and other staff maintain an informal atmosphere that is welcoming to returning patrons, rewarding those that visit regularly with free entry and discounted drinks. The idea is that those patrons who receive free entry and discounts will spend more money over the bar in the long-term, helping the venue remain sustainable.
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The cultural capital attached to participating in the live music experience also attracts economic capital. Door staff play a small but significant role in these exchanges:

It’s not so much about trying to keep out a certain type of person, but rather about keeping an eye out that the people coming in are generally there for the music. (Bek Duke, interview)

Here the door staff perform a gatekeeping role, ensuring that participants are there first and foremost to participate in the live music experience. This implies that those who are not scene participants are generally unwelcome in the space, alluding to the prerequisite need for a certain amount of cultural capital—knowledge of the scene and its bands—or social capital i.e. pre-existing relationships with other participants. Casual drinkers with no obvious interest in the live music event are often discouraged from entering the band room by door staff, as their disinterest marks them as potential trouble-makers. Further, door staff maintain a general suspicion of patrons who are not there for the live music event, as they are seen as outsiders, potentially unversed in the social codes that live music audiences adhere to (such as not talking too loudly during the bands, applauding between songs, and generally demonstrating engagement with the music). Although door staff are inherently linked to the exchange of economic capital, the above quote emphasises the role of social and cultural capital in these spaces. This is because the transaction is not purely economic, and potential patrons need to have a minimum amount of cultural capital to participate, otherwise they face potential ejection from the venue space. Further, like with security staff social capital can be exchanged for entrance into the venue space, as friends of door staff are often given free entry or ‘mates rates’.

2 ‘Mates rates’ may involve a discounted ticket, which might take the form of a free ‘plus one’ or ‘guest pass’.
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Door staff often hold substantial cultural capital, as they are exposed to live music regularly and engage with it on a level that is more casual than musicians or audio engineers:

I would do the door and do the sound [at previous venue Exile on Smith Street], because there was a door right at the front, so I’d do the door for every gig, watch every fucking band... (Rich Stanley, interview)

Door staff are present for the majority of musical performances. They maintain cultural capital in the local scene through their knowledge of local bands, musicians, and other participants, yet engage with musicians on a similar level to audience members and other participants that aren’t as professionally engaged as bar staff and engineers. Door staff accrue cultural capital via their presence in the venue space and are also strongly identified with specific venues.

Door staff meet, greet, and socialise with a variety of scene participants in their role, gaining social capital throughout this process:

Do[ing] the door... you meet everyone and every band... Same as at The Tote, people talking to the owners and bookers at the same time as they’re talking to the bartenders and everybody, it’s like a community. (Anna Burke, interview)

Anna Burke’s role as door staff meant that she was provided with a gateway into the local live music scene. Having moved to Melbourne from Brisbane, her social capital accumulated quickly and she soon moved on to regular bar work at The Old Bar and The Tote. Many of her initial connections in the scene were established through her work as door staff. Bek Duke also discussed the impact working the door has had on her social life:

My social life is work and work is my social life. Even when I was doing the door at The Tote and I might have even done three nights a week at The Tote, I would always run into someone I knew. There was very rarely a gig that I didn’t know someone at so that became my social life in a way. Just seeing friends at work. (Bek Duke, interview)
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Duke frames working at The Tote in much the same way as Burke; a gateway into a local music scene.

Being actively involved in the scene contributes to the social and cultural capital needed to access these spaces at a level beyond casual participation. As door staff are employed for just a few hours a night, they may spend most of their working time in the venue watching the bands or socialising, whether on the job, before, or afterwards. However, this role demands a certain level of assertiveness, labour that is often influenced by perceptions of gender. My interview with Bek Duke raised issues around the gendering of door work. Duke frequently used the colloquial term ‘door bitch’ when describing herself and other women who work as door staff, stating:

You have to be pretty tough, especially when you’re doing the door. I mean we’re called door bitches for a reason… So I suppose if anything it’s made me a bit more outgoing, a bit tougher. I haven’t had a lot of threats of violence against me but any time I have someone’s always going to step in so I’ve never been physically punched or anything. (Bek Duke, interview)

Door staff are often the first to encounter conflict, and the gendered nature of door-work complicates this. Duke discussed the level of assertiveness needed to reject a potentially troubling patron:

I’ve had dudes try it on and get a bit mouthy, but I just tell them they’ve got to leave, it’s not their night and they’re usually out of there. (Bek Duke, interview)

There is a gendering of labour apparent here, in that women must maintain a certain attitude to hold such a position. There is also an assumption in the term ‘door bitch’ that female door staff are somehow unpleasant. This speaks to broader sexist notions around women holding positions of power in the music industry (Leonard 2017; Whiteley 2013), in that their actions or
intentions are often dismissed unless they take a more dominant, assertive stance, which opens them up to criticism for being ‘too aggressive’.

Security guards are often posted alongside door staff for physical protection should a patron become violent. Hence, a working relationship between security and door staff exists. Although they are closely aligned in physical space, these roles and their position in the social space of the local live music scene are very different and are shaped by distinctly different habitus. Door staff usually have a live music-positive habitus and have been hired by the venue due to their distinct cultural and/or social capital. However, security staff are hired for crowd control and physical intimidation. This reflects Judith Butler’s understanding of habitus as the “embodied rituals of everydayness” (Butler 1999, p. 113):

…the body, its gestures, its stylistics, its unconscious ‘knowingness’ is the site for the reconstitution of a practical sense without which social reality would not be constituted as such. The practical sense is a sense of the body, where this body is not a mere positive datum, but the repository or the site of incorporated history. (Butler 1999, pp. 113-114)

In keeping with her theory of gender performativity and its intersection with identity, Butler reframes habitus as inherently corporeal. This is obvious when considering the role of bouncers, and we can observe the way that habitus is embodied (Butler 1999, pp. 115-116) in the differences between security guards and door staff, as both perform a similar role from a very different social (and physical) position. By conforming to the field, the bodies and habitus of security and door staff are shaped differently, fulfilling the behavioural norms expected of these roles in the venue space. The same can be said of bar staff, as I discuss in the following section.
Bar Staff and Shift Managers

A venue’s bar staff occupy a vital position in the local live music scene, as there are several tacit yet formal systems of power between staff, patrons and musicians, as well as amongst the staff themselves, that influence and impact the scene. These systems of power can be observed in the exchanges of social and cultural capital constantly taking place between scene participants. At a venue such as The Old Bar, the owners have a close hand in the overall management of the space. It is their guidance, supervision, professional practices, and booking policies that influence the character of the venue. This is cultural capital made manifest, objectified in the space itself, and embodied in the bar staff. At The Tote, in comparison, the owners allow the staff to dictate the space as they see fit, giving them more agency within the venue. The bar staff at The Tote hold more cultural and social capital in the space, as they are the public ‘persona’ of the venue and make decisions around how the space is coded, whereas the owners retain the more overt forms of economic and symbolic capital.

The bar staff of small live music venues are particularly visible in local music scenes. Their labour adds to the atmosphere of each space and the materiality of these spaces. Their relationships with patrons, musicians and other staff influence the way in which the venue operates and how it is represented throughout the scene. They use their social capital in the scene to bring patrons into the venue space, adding to the overall social capital of the venue itself. This reflects Bourdieu’s definition of social capital as a ‘collectivity-owned capital’:

The volume of the social capital possessed by a given agent thus depends on the size of the network of connections he [or she] can effectively mobilize and on the volume of the capital (economic, cultural or symbolic) possessed in his own right by each of those to whom he is connected (Bourdieu 1986, p. 51).
Bar staff accumulate this social capital through their active and prominent role in the local music scene. Moreover, they network mainly with others in the scene. Their total network of social capital is specific to the local music scene, and they are rich in the kinds of cultural capital that is directly relevant to said scene.

Bar staff contribute to the local music scene of Melbourne’s inner-north on a direct level and have considerable agency within the small venues of The Tote and The Old Bar. Shift managers oversee these staff and answer to the bar’s owners, who themselves handle specific areas of the venue’s management. The Old Bar’s owners divide their responsibilities equally, with Liam Matthews handling general bar management while Singajaya Unlayati administers payroll and accounts, and Joel Morrison takes care of band booking. Although the owners of The Old Bar set the general tone of their business, guiding the musical, aesthetic, and professional direction of the bar and therefore The Old Bar’s overall position in the local live music ecology, they often take a back seat to day-to-day management of the space, handing responsibility over to the shift managers. These managers are entrusted with daily operation of the venue space. With the exception of Morrison, who utilises his social and cultural capital to curate the musical direction of the space (as discussed in the previous chapter), the bar staff are the ostensible ‘face’ of the venue, and it is their social and cultural capital that has considerable value within the venue space.

The owners of The Tote—in comparison to Matthews, Unlayati, and Morrison—take an even more removed and ‘hands-off’ approach, letting band-booker Rich Stanley and venue manager ‘Snoop’ Mitchell run the space. Stanley and Mitchell maintain more agency than The Tote’s owners in the local live music scene, as they dictate the nature of The Tote as a social
hub and the role that its band-rooms play in providing a platform for up-and-coming bands. However, like The Old Bar, The Tote also has shift managers such as my interview participants Matt Fazio, Katie Drane, and previously Therese Martschinke (see Table 1). Such shift managers oversee management of the space on a nightly-basis.

Low wages, poor working conditions, and the general exploitation of hospitality staff have made headlines recently in Victoria, with a number of celebrity chefs and restaurateurs publicly shamed for underpaying their staff (Brown 2017; Schneiders and Miller 2018). In comparison, the owners of The Old Bar treat their staff well, paying them award rates and allowing them to run the space using their own judgement. For example, as the bar’s owners often drink at The Old Bar, staff can ‘cut off’ the owners if they are too intoxicated without fear of negative repercussions. This demonstrates a sense of mutual respect between the owner’s treatment of staff, bands, and other contracted workers. In addition to this, social responsibility and a sense of collective respect for the venue is something that the owners of The Old Bar actively foster:

That’s the thing as well, cultivating a place where everyone feels comfortable and safe and wanting to be here and feeling a little bit of ownership. We like our patrons to feel like this is their place as well as the staff’s place, so that they will look after it and we’ll look after them.

(Joel Morrison, interview)

Maintaining a sense of collective responsibility is beneficial for the venue in that it promotes mutual respect. The Old Bar’s owners actively cultivate “a place where everyone feels comfortable” (Joel Morrison, interview), creating a social space for those whose habitus inclines towards the small venue experience.

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3 To ‘cut off’ is to withhold the service of alcohol.
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The interpersonal practices of bar staff reflect the reputation of the venue and the local music scene associated with it. Having musicians behind the bar and in other positions of influence adds to the vernacular culture of the space and strengthens its ties to the local scene. This represents an intersection between social space and materiality; both the venue’s role in the scene as a social hub and its place in the live music ecology as a performance site. However, a strong distinction was made between attitudes of bar staff and respect towards each venue space:

The Tote’s all over the shop… But Old Bar I find there’s a lot more respect at Old Bar, patrons and staff. Because when I was working [at The Tote], you can do what you want, like get fucken loaded, smashed, like shots all night… I just think when you’re at Old Bar you don’t want to, you’re totally smashed, you still don’t want to disrespect the place. Where I think [at The Tote] you don’t give a fuck, like you can just be a dickhead till you get kicked out. (interview)

The distinction between staff behaviour at each venue is made clear when placed in juxtaposition:

The Tote always seems to be way more raucous… It’s like you go to The Old Bar if you want to sit at the bar and drink a few whiskies after you’ve finished [working] and you end up at The Tote if you are smashed and in party mode… And, like I said before, I feel like that comes down to the fact that you can get away with more at The Tote because people don’t respect the space as much… Less rules, unspoken rules. (interview)

The ‘loose’ vibe of The Tote is framed as a lack of respect for the venue space. This echoes previous statements regarding the lack of “unspoken rules” (interviews), which are framed in terms of feeling “like you can get away with more” (interviews). The difference in attitudes towards each space was reinforced throughout my interviews with venue staff:

The Tote’s exceptionally loose and I think that can be detrimental to the business in a way… They don’t have as much input or control, they’re a bit more negative too, the owners. They’re not as supportive of their workers and they stand back a lot more. But Old Bar, obviously they’re all major advocates and they all play music themselves. They
come and drink here with everyone so it’s much more welcoming from the management, which is really nice. I think that’s one of the main assets of The Old Bar is that welcoming vibe. That’s not to say that The Tote doesn’t have that, I think the staff create the positive vibe at The Tote, whereas at Old Bar it’s staff and owners. (interview)

Respect for the space stems from mutual respect between owners and staff. The role that The Old Bar’s owners have in articulating a sense of place is emphasised, whereas the owners of The Tote let “the staff create the positive vibe at The Tote”. This is interesting as although it means that The Old Bar’s owners curate the space, the bar staff at The Tote have more control over the venue and its social space. However, the tension between the staff and owners at The Tote is also mentioned. The Tote’s owners have an impact on the venue, even though they are not actively present in the space. This brings to mind the kind of ‘outsiders’ that impact the live music ecology yet refrain from participation in the scene itself, as discussed in the previous chapter.

The fact that two of The Old Bar’s owners, Liam Matthews and Joel Morrison, are practicing musicians who have been active in the Melbourne music scene for over a decade adds to the cultural capital that The Old Bar holds, as their individual cultural capital as active scene participants contributes to the venue’s standing and status in the local scene. Having a large amount of musicians working in the venue also lends The Old Bar a reputation as being practitioner-friendly. Further, The Old Bar is “very welcoming to bands” (Joel Morrison, interview) and this is reflected in the form of musicians working behind the bar. This demonstrates that bar staff and musicians in small venue spaces are often part of the same group, and each make efforts to relate to one another in situations where there is a point of mutual understanding. Old Bar manager and musician Dan McKay stated that he feels comfortable performing in venues that share The Old Bar’s sense of familiarity:
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I think it’s just the nature of the bands, and the relationship with the booker, and also just the relationship with the place, all our friends will come to our gigs, and would go to these two venues anyway [The Old Bar and The Tote], so it’s a no-brainer, and they’re just good rooms to play, comfortable, we know the staff, we feel at home in these two places. (Dan McKay, interview)

Familiarity and ease of access impacts the performance practices of local musicians. A sense of comfort and an established rapport, or ‘shared habitus’, with staff positions such fields as attractive performance sites for musicians, as venues whose staff are familiar with the local live music scene can cater to the needs of musicians more readily.

The Old Bar and The Tote are dependent on vernacular culture—embodied and objectified in their cultural capital—for meaning and reputation, and staff have considerable influence over such factors:

You talk to a lot of the bands that are playing, you strike up friendships that way, and being a bar manager I get to deal with the bands a lot, and being in a band and being on the other side of the bar for many years I know how to just be a cool bar guy to deal with… so it’s like, “Hey man, yeah like band room upstairs,” and just make them feel comfortable, because if the band feels comfortable in a venue it’ll probably affect their performance, they’ll feel comfortable on stage and they’ll want to come back. (Dan McKay, interview)

Here, McKay touches on notions of familiarity and comfort, specifically regarding other musicians and his own experience. The level of care he takes is collegial and gives weight to Morrison’s claim that the hospitality extended to musicians at The Old Bar is evident in the attitudes of staff. However, much of this is due to a strong alignment between habitus and field, as these musicians and participants are already predisposed to feel at home in such spaces.

The role that socialising plays in the decision-making of participants can heavily affect which venues they attend. Familiar social settings can be the main point of attraction for many. The presence of familiar and friendly
staff adds a welcoming atmosphere to each venue, making these spaces more accessible. The social capital of bar staff is converted into the cultural capital of the venue. This lends weight to the physical space of the main bar or ‘front bar’ and its role in facilitating socialization; its ‘social space’. Venue owners and management demonstrated an awareness of the staff’s influence over each venue space. Management at both The Tote and The Old Bar discussed the need to have ‘the right staff’—those with the appropriate amount of social and cultural capital—behind the bar:

...it’s keeping the right staff who give that vibe as well; people who aren’t going to take shit, but people [who] are still going to make everybody feel welcome and still kind of put up with a pretty demanding job. Everybody has a sense of entitlement when they come here... they expect it because they’ve always paid five dollars for a Melbourne tinny [can of beer], they always will... It’s a delicate situation. (‘Snoop’ Mitchell, interview)

The ‘sense of entitlement’ mentioned here is associated with the social capital that regular patrons of The Tote carry with them. This is not always directly convertible into economic capital such as discounted drinks and free entry. A participant’s social capital is worthless if the staff do not know who they are. Therefore, the process of maintaining social capital in venue spaces and local music scenes is dependent on a need to participate and engage regularly.

Social and cultural capital play an important role in the hiring of bar staff. ‘Snoop’ Mitchell discussed the hiring policy at The Tote, which is mainly by reputation and referral, processes strongly informed by an individual’s social and cultural capital. He also emphasised that many of the staff members are musicians:

In the six years, or five-and-a-half that we’ve been reopened, I don’t think that there’s been any person who’s been hired that hasn’t been known to somebody [already working here]. It’s generally never advertised. You go ‘someone’s leaving’, and we say to the other staff, ‘do you guys know anyone who you think would be a good fit here?’ (‘Snoop’ Mitchell, interview)
Mitchell takes a curatorial approach to hiring bar staff, picking and choosing from scene participants to get a ‘good fit’ for the bar. This is important as it emphasises the potential economic benefits of an alignment between an individual’s habitus, their stock of social and cultural capital, and the field of the local music scene. Bar staff at The Tote need to have the requisite amount of social and cultural capital before being considered for the job. This keeps these roles in the scene, limiting them to ‘insiders’. However, as ‘insiders’ have more social and cultural capital in the scene they are able to mobilise these forms of capital in exchange for economic capital, attracting other participants and potential patrons to The Tote.

A theme touched on regularly throughout my fieldwork interviews was the intersection between bar staff’s professional and social lives:

“It’s like my social life, maybe 40% of my social life is The Old Bar, which I love. I’ve got my job there because I played there. I’ve had a few residencies there on Saturday afternoons. I’ve played there a whole lot and I love it... Then, I got a text from Liam and he was like, “Hey, do you want to work at The Public Bar? Do you want to work at the door?” I was like, “Yeah,” he was like, “Do you want to work at The Old Bar?” I was like, “Yes!” Yeah, I’m really grateful for working at The Old Bar because it’s a big chunk of my social life. (Georgia McDonald, interview)

McDonald was first introduced to The Old Bar as a musician. She therefore already maintains a live music-positive habitus. This would have aided in ingratiating herself to the space. As McDonald’s initial introduction to the venue space was via The Old Bar’s role as a social hub for musicians, her habitus was already aligned with the field of the local live music scene and the social space of The Old Bar. This type of alignment was echoed by other musicians and bar staff at the venue:

“I would probably describe it as a community in the sense that people aren’t going to these venues just as customers... I feel like the people who are going to The Tote or The Old Bar are going there with the intention of being involved in something together even if they are just...
an audience member… In terms of The Old Bar, I think the owners have also made it a decent place to work in terms of pay and environment, which keeps the staff around and means that the community can’t escape. It’s not just a job. (Adam Curley, interview)

Bar staff convey a sense of familiarity. The role of a working environment that enhances a feeling of community is also emphasised here. A correlation can be observed between a healthy, supportive working environment and the broader sense of belonging that is to be found in these venue spaces by scene participants. Bar staff are emotionally invested in the community that surrounds The Old Bar and therefore regular patrons are more inclined to invest as well, whether socially, emotionally, or financially. However, one must possess the habitus required to be accepted in such a community. This was demonstrated in Mitchell’s role as general manager of The Tote.

As discussed previously, many of The Tote’s bar staff are insiders in the local live music scene, particularly Mitchell who performed at the venue regularly as a musician before working his way up the ranks to general manager. However, Mitchell identified a number of negative elements associated with his role:

If there’s any bad shit that needs to happen, I’m the one who has to deliver on that… So it’s definitely changed relationships I’ve had before I started working here. My social identity is tied to this place, and it’s the same as if I go out anywhere else, it’s always one of the first questions I’ll always hear… How come you’re not at the Tote?... And I think that this place will be kind of, even after I leave this place, whenever that is, it’ll still be a big part of who I am and how other people see me. That’s unavoidable. (Snoop Mitchell, interview)

Mitchell’s identity is intrinsically tied up with his role as manager of The Tote and the cultural capital attached to this role. He identifies several pros and cons, demonstrating the nuances of socialising in the context of this field. This is an interesting example of cultural capital having a perceptibly negative effect. Mitchell feels too defined by his cultural capital, as it is often all that
other participants’ judge him by. This leads to a false assumption that Mitchell has power over The Tote; that his social and cultural capital is directly convertible into symbolic capital. However, Mitchell stated that he feels more like a caretaker:

> There are people who will make an effort to come and find me and introduce themselves, just because I’m the manager of The Tote. It’s flattering, but I don’t really have that much power… I just make sure that we’ve got enough beer to sell and that the lights are still on and there’s still toilet paper. I’ve got this idea of what it was when I started coming in here and I want to keep that going, but make little changes here and there that I feel would make it better for everyone. (Snoop Mitchell, interview)

The juxtaposition between what other participants’ assume of him and how Mitchell interprets his role reflects how cultural capital is bestowed upon individuals by the field, as “the criteria of what counts as cultural capital are relatively robust and cannot be suspended by agents choosing not to accept them… regardless of whether a given characteristic of an agent is attractive and desirable” (Jensen 2006, p. 260).

Mitchell’s power—his ‘symbolic capital’—is bestowed upon him by the field of the local live music scene and its participants. This relates to his role in the cultural narrative of The Tote, as his power is directly related to the venue’s standing in the live music ecology. The cultural narrative and myth of The Tote is maintained in the everyday activities of upkeep and preservation that Mitchell performs as the venue’s manager. The fact that he feels the need to preserve The Tote in its current state affirms the power he has over the space. This power is imbricated in the mundane activities of general maintenance, rendering it less visible than other forms of capital. Further, the way that he manages the bar has a large impact on the space, but this is only apparent in the social and cultural capital of his staff rather than himself. Thus Mitchell has symbolic capital, but he fails to recognise it in
himself, as it is bestowed upon him by others. His position in the local music scene is therefore already predetermined by the field.

The sense of shared social space described in the section above stretches across the local music scene to include security, door staff, bar staff, musicians, and other venue workers. Although there is a certain amount of social and cultural capital needed to access this, it remains a positive attribute of the local music scene:

All the bands jump between all of those venues and so do staff actually. You’ve got a lot of Tote staff [at The Old Bar] now, which is cool… I think it brings that community aspect. It’s not about the business side of things, it’s about people and what we’re all doing together, so that’s cool. I would encourage that, I think. (Jen Drane, interview)

The link between The Old Bar and The Tote further strengthens the notion of shared social space, as the same musicians and bar staff traverse these venues, positioning them in the same field/scene. The casual nature of hospitality work means that many bartenders are employed across a variety of venue spaces. The labour of musicians is even more precarious. Local musicians play as regularly as they can in the spaces that make them feel welcomed and support them. As The Old Bar and The Tote represent a particular subsection of the Melbourne live music scene, certain bands perform at these two venues often, placing them in a similar strata of the local live music ecology to one another. A discussion of musicians and their relationship with my case study venues is continued further in the section below.

**Musicians**

Musicians are omnipresent in small venues, influencing the social fabric of these spaces. Musicians meet, socialise, work, and perform in small venues,
and often stay late to fraternise. They are seen in the audience before and after their performances, as well as during the performances of other musicians. The hierarchy of performance and reception (Shuker 2012, p. 201) is largely diminished by the ubiquity of musical practice amongst the scene’s participants. This reinforces the informal and accessible nature of music-making in local music scenes. It also affirms the small venue space as a field in and of itself. Musicians are defined by their relationships with bar staff, the audience, venue owners, band bookers, and other musicians. Their position in the field and the way this influences their habitus is reliant on how they relate to other scene participants, which also affects their status in the live music ecology.

The majority of acts that perform at The Old Bar and The Tote are local. In particular, The Old Bar’s band room is largely the domain of hobbyist musicians. As the room is small, the physical limitations of the space restrict the types of bands booked, as those with large followings are more likely to play bigger rooms. This means that the majority of groups that perform at The Old Bar are of an amateur or semi-professional nature. This adds to the informal vibe of the bar and reduces the barriers between performers and the audience. The venue dynamic is less formal than larger venues, and this feature is characteristic of small venue spaces. The physical space of the venue influences its social space. However, it is not uncommon for regional or interstate groups to perform regularly at both The Old Bar and The Tote, as they are performance spaces and social hubs for local and translocal music scenes. The Old Bar and The Tote also occasionally feature low-profile international acts, as well as firmly established local bands looking for an intimate performance setting, adding a level of prestige and trans-locality to these sites.
Musicians perpetuate the live music scene not only through their musical performances but also the social interactions between them. They socialise with other musicians and support each other, gaining social and cultural capital in the process. As musician Thomy Sloane stated, “[y]eah, all my mates are either in a band or musicians themselves, or in some kind of subculture that ends up being at the pub every day… The Tote, Old Bar, Bendigo, Bar Open” (Thomy Sloane, interview). Sloane emphasises the role of social space here, framing ‘the pub’ as a social hub for the local scene. He sees this scene as being centred around several live music venues spread across Melbourne’s inner-northern suburbs of Fitzroy and Collingwood. These venues are aligned with an aesthetic of sticky carpets and loud rock music and encompass the scenes’ field. Therefore, a certain habitus is needed to feel as comfortable as Sloane does in these spaces and the field in which they are situated. As a white, male musician playing punk-rock in Melbourne’s inner-north Sloane has the appropriate amount of social and cultural capital to engage with these spaces, as his habitus inclines towards the field just as the field inclines towards his habitus (Butler 1999, p. 117). This emphasises the importance of musicianship in the social circles that make up the local scene, as being an active musician adds to one’s social and cultural capital. The group dynamic between musicians can be described as its own specific field, scene, or ‘club’. Talking about music between musicians invites a deeper understanding. The spaces in which these musicians congregate become ‘clubhouses’ of sorts; social hubs where musicians meet regularly. Thus, “live performance can certainly promote creativity, with venues as the central hubs for particular music scenes and genres” (Homan 2014, p. 154). The role of musicians should therefore be considered as part of the wider live music ecology.
Finally, musicians populate The Old Bar and The Tote, often doing non-musical labour. This includes working as bar staff, sound engineers, or in other professional music industry roles (such as music writers, publicists, and record label workers). Therefore, musicians can be found behind the bar, on the door, behind the sound desk, and throughout the audience, as well as onstage. The line between participants and practitioners is blurred. Those that participate in music scenes do so temporarily and most participants put on and take off “scene identities” regularly (Peterson and Bennett 2004, p. 3). A participant’s engagement might inspire them to further their musical abilities. Musicians are participants and vice versa (Danto 1999, p. 216). However, engagement with music scenes does not necessitate musical ability or a ‘musical habitus’, although such characteristics certainly improve individual social and cultural capital in music scenes. This is because “[t]he habitus maintains a constrained but non-causal relation to the practices that it informs… [which] emerge at the site of conjuncture between the habitus and what Bourdieu will call specific social ‘fields’” (Butler 1999, p. 114). We must therefore consider both field and habitus when discussing musicians and their practice. This is discussed further in the following case studies on Gold Class and Camp Cope, two notable local bands that have emerged from my case study venues and the surrounding local music scene.

Gold Class and Camp Cope

Small live music venues not only serve as valuable community spaces and active social hubs for music scenes. They are also incubators for emerging talent and the development of new talent. Two bands that formed out of interactions happening in and around the local music scene of Melbourne’s inner-north, and my case study venues in particular, are post-punk group
Gold Class and rock trio Camp Cope. These acts performed their first shows at The Old Bar, The Tote, and The Old Bar’s sister venue The Public Bar (which was then owned by The Old Bar’s co-owners Liam Matthews, Joel Morrison, and Singajaya Unlayati), and have since gained international recognition.

The following sections will discuss the role of The Old Bar and The Tote in fostering the initial stages of these bands careers, how these bands have leveraged their social and cultural capital into symbolic and economic success, and the changing status of these musicians in the local music scene and broader live music ecology. I have chosen these two acts as case study examples to demonstrate how small venues facilitate the social conditions ideal for musical acts to form through social interactions between scene participants. This is significant as such interactions occur in the same small venue spaces in which these bands performed their first shows. Further, these two bands used these small venues to gain a foot-hold in the local live music ecology and, while capitalising on their own cultural and social capital in the local scene, used these spaces as ‘stepping stones’ towards bigger stages. Therefore, these small venues are not only launching pads for emerging musical acts to use as platforms towards greater opportunities, but are also social spaces wherein the initial discussions and sharing of interests that are foundational to the formation of bands and strengthening of creative bonds occur.

Gold Class

Formed by vocalist Adam Curley and guitarist Evan Purdey, local post-punk group Gold Class (see Figure 15) is a band whose history is entrenched in The Old Bar and its social space. The band is made up of established local
musicians, all of whom have worked in hospitality roles in the local small venue scene, as well as other music industry roles such as instrument-making, music journalism, and DJing. Gold Class have been chosen here as an ideal case study as not only did the group play their first shows in the venues mentioned above, but the core individuals that make up the band met while working at The Old Bar. They hold a considerable amount of cultural and social capital relevant to the field of the Melbourne music scene, and are positioned well in terms of the local live music ecology.

Gold Class vocalist Adam Curley has worked in the Australian music media for over a decade, as a music writer, publicist, musician, and venue worker. He began working at The Old Bar in 2011 as a bartender, having previously hosted a monthly queer night there called ‘Truck Stop Cock’. Through The Old Bar he befriended Evan Purdey, another bartender and musician, and the two began discussing the idea of forming a band. Purdey had formerly performed as a solo artist, as well as a guitarist for established local rock outfit The Dacios:

Gold Class was formed out of meeting at the bar and getting drunk and saying “Hey, do you want to start a band.” (Evan Purdey, interview)

We met basically through working at the Old Bar I guess... We were drinking together a lot at the time and going out a lot and [Purdey] was just talking about bands and playing in bands and I was talking about the fact that I’d been in bands, but only as a singer and then I got my guitar and he kind of just suggested that he would give me a tape of his guitar ideas and that if I liked them I could write some lyrics and stuff to them and we could kick some stuff around. (Adam Curley, interview)

Here the pair make reference to drinking together and ‘going out a lot’ as an influencing factor in the narrative of the band’s formation. Both were already immersed in the local scene prior to the band’s formation. The social capital that was formative in their meeting and accrued further through the scene
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Figure 15 - Gold Class: Publicity image (l-r: Jon Shub, Adam Curley, Logan Gibson, Evan Purdey)
Chapter 5 - Scene

aided them in securing various performance opportunities early on in the band’s career.

There is a presumption in the quotes above that the interactions and conversations that were formative in the band’s history occurred in the venues that both Curley and Purdey worked and frequented; established small live music venues in Melbourne’s inner-north:

Definitely before I worked there, Old Bar was my favourite place. It still is in a sense, but like it’s taken on a very different kind of role in my life now. (Evan Purdey, interview)

I mostly hang out at The Old Bar and The Tote. (Adam Curley, interview)

When asked as to why he frequents these two venues Curley stated that he feels as though there are more people he knows there, implicating social capital, habitus, leisure, and a feeling of belonging:

I suppose I feel like if it’s at The Old Bar or The Tote, it’s far more likely that my friends will be there, because it’s more likely that my friends will go to The Old Bar or The Tote… (Adam Curley, interview)

He also iterated that although the bands that perform at these venues are an influence on the crowd, the appeal of the audience is often more substantial than the musical acts themselves:

I feel that people are more likely to go to those places and therefore I am more likely to go to those places. It kind of creates a sense of community around those places, and it feels a bit more welcoming in that sense. You don’t feel like you’re just turning up to a venue and you don’t know anyone, or you don’t really have any affinity with the other people who are there. (Adam Curley, interview)

Notions of community and belonging are emphasised here, especially the role of regular participants and the venue’s staff in fostering a ‘comfortable atmosphere’. This is habitus-field congruence made explicit, as Curley maintains a sense of habitus that aligns well with the field of the local music scene as a musician, bartender, and engaged scene participant.
When asked the same question, Purdey’s answer was more complex and emphasised a conflict between participating in the live music event (i.e. watching the band) and socialising with other participants:

I would say it’s probably more a social thing because even sometimes when you’re going to go and watch a band, you’ll just end up in the dish because you’re having a drink and you’re catching-up with people and whatever and time gets away from you, which is a negative way to look at it… (Evan Purdey, interview)

As former and current staff of several Melbourne live music venues, the members of Gold Class negotiate the social space of these venues more confidently than others. This also offers the band a clear advantage in that the social networks vital to success in the local live music scene were already in place by way of each member’s personal connections prior to the band’s formation. The band were able to quickly gain high-profile international support slots, festival billing, and headline shows in Melbourne’s more significant small venues. Much of this depended on their individual and collective social and cultural capital. Gold Class have successfully converted this social and cultural capital into symbolic—and arguably—economic capital. This capital and its conversion was premised on their initial roles as venue staff at The Old Bar and the social space that this gave them access to, aiding in the continued strengthening of their habitus-field congruence. Gold Class have since gone on to leverage this into critical acclaim, local awards, festival slots, and international touring opportunities. It is evident then that bands that ascribe to regular socialising in the local scene are presented with more opportunities, regardless of whether these opportunities are their primary objective (Rogers 2008, p. 644).

Musicians are not necessarily guided by the pursuit of fame or money, but sometimes rather a “desired social experience” (Frith 1992, p. 184). In this context, soft forms of capital are prioritised over harder economic forms.
and are seen as more desirable to music scene participants. These soft forms of capital include the desire for intensified leisure in the form of creating and performing music (a type of cultural capital), and the pleasures derived from the communal nature of the scene (social capital) (Rogers 2008). In discussing what kind of effect social networks\(^4\) have on his band, Curley emphasised the importance of familiarity and sociality:

> I was involved already in these venues and with these people before I started playing with Gold Class so it’s kind of hard to tell, but I suppose it impacts the places you play because you want to play places where you know your friends will go. (Adam Curley, interview)

Social capital plays a large role in local music scenes and small venues contribute to its generation and exchange by providing musicians with a social space in which to interact and share mutual interests. These interactions lead to the formation of bands and the furthering of music industry careers, and are fundamental to the live music ecology and its ongoing sustainability.

Gold Class (see Figure 16) were formed out of social interactions and a shared musical interest. Their collective social networks and cultural capital have assured them an established place in the Melbourne music scene and Australian live music ecology beyond that. Gold Class are therefore a group of musicians that are positioned well in terms of their habitus and its relation to the field. Since forming, Gold Class have released two well-received full-length albums, have toured nationally multiple times, including a number of prominent high-profile support and festival slots, and have also embarked on numerous international tours, finding a considerable audience in the UK and Europe. All of this success was premised on their ability to leverage support

\(^4\) The social networks formed by musicians and the benefits of these have been written about at length (see Cohen 1991; Finnegan 1989; Gallan and Gibson 2013; Gallan 2012; Kruse 2003).
in their hometown, a feat they were able to do more efficiently given their immersion in the local scene, both as individuals and as a band. Therefore, their collective social and cultural capital meant that they were able to make the transition to becoming a successful band—at least in terms of symbolic capital (e.g. awards, tours, coveted performance slots etc.)—more easily than most.

Gold Class’s ‘everyday’ experience of the local music scene aided their broader success, as they were able to capitalise on these experiences and translate them into substantial symbolic outcomes. The implication of hobbyist musical practices is present here, with importance placed on the everyday relevance of these practices regardless of their economic value (Gallan 2012, p. 38). The day-to-day happenings of small venues reveals their significance, as an understanding of these minutiae provides further evidence of their social and cultural value, especially for emergent young musicians. This was also reflected in the narrative of Camp Cope, a band that started from a similar place to that of Gold Class and have gone on to become rather world-conquering.
Figure 16 - Gold Class performing at The Old Bar for the venue’s ‘Decade of Dickhead’ ten-year anniversary celebrations
Camp Cope

Melbourne trio Camp Cope (see Figure 17) formed out of a friendship between local singer-songwriter Georgia McDonald, drummer, manager and music industry worker Sarah ‘Thomo’ Thompson, and bassist Kelly-Dawn Hellmrich. The band have become prominent activists for the acknowledgement of gender bias and sexual assault in the music industry. They have garnered significant acclaim in the mainstream press as well as high-profile festival slots and have sold-out shows at the Sydney Opera House, along with a number of successful overseas tours. All of this comes from a few chance encounters in and around The Old Bar and its surrounding scene of musicians and creative industry workers.

Camp Cope formed in mid-2015. Having played a number of solo shows in and around Melbourne’s inner-north, Georgia McDonald met Sarah ‘Thomo’ Thompson at the annual Poison City Weekender Festival the previous year:

I met her [Thompson] just like at shows because we go to the same shows… I guess like Old Bar really… I think we properly met at the Poison City Weekender, the acoustic Old Bar show that I got asked to play, which was so exciting… Yeah, we just met there and she was hanging out with this girl that I knew from like five years ago… I was like, What the fuck? How do you know each other? Blah blah blah, let’s all be friends.” Then I played this boat show on a boat; it was like a Poison City, Apple Core [Festival] kind of thing… Then, yeah, we hung out with Thomo on this boat with a bunch of other people because I just didn’t know anyone. It was super cool and that’s how I met Thomo. (Georgia McDonald, interview)

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5 Poison City Weekender is a local music festival organised by Melbourne punk and hardcore label Poison City Records encompassing multiple venues across a long weekend, including The Old Bar and The Tote.
Figure 17 - Camp Cope: Publicity image (l-r: Georgia McDonald, Sarah Thompson, Kelly-Dawn Hellmrich)
This origin story speaks to the close social space of The Old Bar and its surrounding local scene, emphasising the significance of this space as a breeding ground for new musical acts. Through pre-existing social connections, young and emergent musicians are able to establish musical connections, capitalising on their social capital in order to collaborate and make art with others:

I wanted to start a band for ages and Thomo was like—“I’m getting my drum kit sent down from Queensland.” I was like, “Oh my god, you play drums, I didn’t know this… let’s have a jam. Let’s try to smash something out.” We started jamming and it started sounding good and then I was getting tattooed in my friend’s kitchen… This girl, Kelly [Hellmrich], who I’d like kind of briefly met but not really spoken to, she walks in and started talking about music because that’s what musicians do… I was like, “What do you play?” She was like, “I play bass,”…Then I sent her a solo recording that I had and then we met at this rehearsal space one day and we jammed for like five and a half hours and it just worked. (Georgia McDonald, interview)

Social interactions in informal creative settings contribute to the formation of musical acts. The network of venues, rehearsal spaces, house shows, and other realms of cultural production (such as informal tattoo parlours) are all part of the live music ecology, giving form and a sense of cohesion to the local music scenes that surround and are housed in these spaces.

The role of small live music venues as places of belonging relies on feelings of comfort, familiarity, and sociality amongst local scene participants. During the early stages of Camp Cope’s career, Georgia McDonald was working at The Old Bar. Throughout our conversation she emphasised the social connections and musical exposure she gained through her work at the venue:

I work at The Old Bar and that’s my social life right there… I get my social fix from the two nights a week I work at Old Bar and other little things. I guess there are a lot of bands that play there… so many bands that I’ve never even heard of. They come and play at The Old Bar and it’ll be the best. It’s like discovering new things and it’s super, super
McDonald echoes previously established notions of belonging, sociality, and community. She frames The Old Bar as an overwhelmingly social space, specifically emphasising the musical connections and inspiration she draws from working at the venue. This was reiterated by her bandmate Sarah ‘Thomo’ Thompson.

A prominent regular at The Old Bar and Camp Cope’s manager, Thompson previously worked at well-known independent record label Shock before becoming a key part of the team at local record label and retail outlet Poison City Records (Sarah Thompson, interview). As an experienced music industry worker, Thompson was able to leverage her tacit knowledge of the local scene and live music ecology, her contacts and networks, and her own cache of cultural capital into quickly establishing Camp Cope as a professional and ambitious act. Much of this tacit knowledge and social and cultural capital was premised on her pre-existing standing in the local live music scene of Melbourne’s inner-north.

Thompson is known locally as a loyal patron of The Old Bar and previously held the record for money spent over the bar, a clear example of social and cultural capital converted:

Somebody decided they can beat my record at The Old Bar…I have the record for money over the bar at The Old Bar on a weekday [for my exhibition]. That’s the ultimate Old Bar record, how much money The Old Bar’s ever made of all time on a weekday. And then for my birthday I made the weekend one. I wanted to beat my own record as a competitive person. Then Joel [Morrison] was like “Someone’s beaten your record”. I was like “What? This is a joke?” … So I think we’re going to put on another one soon. (Sarah Thompson, interview)

Thompson’s connection to The Old Bar is one of a regular patron who has immersed themselves in the social space of the venue, forming professional
and social bonds with the owners, staff, local musicians, and regular patrons, positioning the venue as a site of identity and belonging:

You go to one [show] there and you’re like “This place is the best!” Happy to come here every day, definitely. I mean, as you know the guys who own it are awesome. You want to support them... They do really good shows and they put in a lot of work and stuff so you want to support them as well as see good shows… Because it feels like they actually care about what they’re doing. (Sarah Thompson, interview)

Again, the notion of small live music venues as social clubs or as “home, but with a bar in it” (Sarah Thompson, interview) reflects the strong associations musicians and other scene participants have with these spaces.

Thompson also demonstrated a strong awareness of the local live music ecology, each venue’s place within it, and the relationship between them:

I know that obviously they’re opposing owners, well not opposing but you know they’re owned by different people and everything but I feel like most pubs around Melbourne, especially in this area, because it’s very cosmopolitan, I think everyone supports each other. I mean it’s not like Joel [Morrison] who owns The Old Bar hasn’t played a show at The Tote or gone to a show at The Tote. Everyone seems to do what they do. (Sarah Thompson, interview)

Commercial competition is framed here as secondary to the sustainability of local live music culture and the interdependent relationships between local venues that sustain the live music ecology. This reflects earlier statements by my interview participants, discussed throughout my analysis chapters.

As a group of musicians entrenched in the everyday of Melbourne’s live music scene, Camp Cope are positioned well in terms of their ability to navigate the live music ecology while also critiquing it heavily and offering a strong voice for women in the local music industry (Hennessy 2018). A well-networked and effective manager, Sarah Thompson has positioned the band as a powerful emerging force in the Australian music landscape. The band are a testament to the way in which small venues act as important meeting
places for musicians, contributing to the Australian and international live music ecology in a direct and observable manner. Thompson emphasised the role of small venues as social hubs in our interview:

I guess when you think about it, working in music, you meet most of the people that your friends with through work or going to shows. I met you going to shows! There’s not many people that I can think of that I hang out with on a regular basis that I don’t know from this place [Fitzroy/Collingwood]. Whether it be random, I meet them at a show or they’re friends with someone else you’re out with at a show… You know you’ve got a similar interest if you’re at a particular venue or a particular show. (Sarah Thompson, interview)

Camp Cope is an ideal example of a band that met through “moments of seemingly purposeless sociability” (Straw 2001, p. 250), yet have gone on to make purposeful and considerable gains in the local music industry, performing around the world and breaking through to achieve considerable commercial success. In this context, the impact of small live music venues is undeniable.

The notion of small live music venues as valuable social spaces for the grassroots cultural production that needs to occur in order to produce successful artists is not new, but it is underdeveloped in its theorisation. My contribution has been to use the theories of Bourdieu to investigate, analyse, and explain the previously unexplored connections between local music scenes and the live music ecology, demonstrating this connection through case studies of two bands—Gold Class and Camp Cope—both of which began their careers performing in the small venues analysed throughout this thesis. However, what is more significant is that before either of them played their first note together, these bands formed out of conversations and interactions that took place in these very same spaces.

There are many reasons as to why musicians tend to congregate in small venues. One determining factor is habitus-field congruence, which
facilitates ease of access. Musicians involved in a scene feel at ease in places that facilitate their continued participation. The case studies of Gold Class and Camp Cope provide two significant examples for the value of small live music venues for musicians. The emerging careers of these bands owe their being to these spaces, as each formed out of an organic process facilitated by the sociality housed in and around the small venues of Melbourne’s inner-north. In very real terms we can see how these bands grew out of these spaces, amongst social interactions happening behind, in front, and around these bars, and made real in the band rooms so directly linked to this air of sociality. As musicians participate in the same community of practice, it would follow that a venue that facilitates their interests would be popular in such a scene, reaffirming Butler’s argument that habitus and field are mutually co-constituted (Butler 1999). This extends to include other participants, including local live music audiences.

Live Music Audiences

Live music audiences occupy a crucial position in local music scenes. They are both passive and (re)active, engaged yet removed. Live music audiences are able to simultaneously embody the contradictory representations of fandom implicit in the duality of audience theory. Early criticism of popular culture, particularly that of Adorno and the Frankfurt School, cast audiences as passive masses, easily manipulated and influenced (Adorno 1991; Adorno 1941). However, later discussions of audience theory emphasise the audience’s role as active consumers whose tastes influence engagement and whose participation influences trends (Albertazzi and Cobley 2008; Ross and Nightingale 2003; DeNora 2000). In grasping this duality, it is important to acknowledge the diversity of experiences inherent in audiences, as “[t]he
opposition between passive and active views of audiences must not be overstated. What needs highlighting is the tension between musical audiences as collective groups and, at the same time, as individual consumers” (Shuker 2012, p. 19). Here, both Adorno’s view of audiences as passive consumers and recent theories of cultural engagement as formative coalesce, as social actors are influenced by both the field they engage in, while also constructing the field or ‘scene’ through this engagement (Butler 1999, p. 113).

Audiences participating in small live music events are often so varied in their habits of consumption and multifaceted in their involvement that it is difficult to summarise their individual motives adequately. Although many attend small venues specifically for the experience of engaging with live music, the social experience of participating in such activities is also a major point of appeal. Also, engagement with local music scenes does not necessarily require an intrinsic knowledge of the scene and its bands. Rather, participation may be dependent on a preference towards the audience, the staff, or the venue spaces themselves. Such assertions reaffirm the active nature of audiences, while also recognising that such consumption is shaped by social conditions (Shuker 2012, p. 19).

Limitations to access have a fundamental effect on the success of live music scenes (Whiting and Carter 2016). These local scenes are articulated and reified in the social interactions that occur between participants. Scenes cannot be accessible to all, otherwise they would lose what makes them identifiable as collective sociality. However, this is not to say that live music scenes and the spaces that make them up are not welcoming places, but that a participant’s habitus—their accumulated social and cultural capital and its congruence with the field—is what makes access easier. Further, there seems to be a ‘sliding scale’ of participation amongst venue-goers. For example,
some participants are more active than others, booking and hosting events and regular/themed nights at specific venues, performing in bands, working in the venue as bar staff, or overseeing audio engineering (see Table 1). Others participate in broader ways, such as work in music publicity, or running a blog that gives bands and therefore the venues exposure. These participants have an indirect influence on the vibrancy of each venue space, as their professional and creative output influences local music scenes generally.

Finally, participants take the form of regular patrons, who are either there to socialise, participate in the live music experience, or both. Most contribute to the venue on some level, whether financially through their patronage, or with a less tangible currency such as social or cultural capital. All of the participants discussed and interviewed in the chapter above are members of the live music audience. This section is therefore comparatively brief, as door staff, bar staff, managers, and musicians already constitute a substantial cross-section of the live music audience, and have therefore already been considered and discussed. Further, these participants all contribute to the local live music ecology through their continued engagement with the surrounding live music culture. This section has remained focused on audiences in the abstract, but also as an important component of the local music scene that shares members of all of the participant groups previously discussed above.

Conclusion

A live music scene is made up of a variety of participants engaging in professional, semi-professional, and other social activities that are often blurred. The live music scene that encompasses my case study venues is
Chapter 5 - Scene

primarily made up of venue staff and other social agents whose participation takes on multiple forms, as musicians, audience members etc. It is these participants and the interactions between them—the scene—that the live music ecology is built upon. Scenes are made up of groups of insiders privy to the nuances, codes, and associated cultural capital of each scene. The live music ecology takes the agency of scene participants into account—along with the venue spaces themselves, as well as other social agents operating outside of the scene—in order to inform a cohesive understanding of the live music culture of a city.

Public entertainment is implicit in any live music scene. Social capital is exchanged in the small venues of Melbourne’s inner-north and can be observed in the interactions between musicians, audiences, patrons, staff, bands, and booking agents. Facilitated by the small live music venues that play host to music scenes, the coming together of fans and musicians for purposes of mutual appreciation serves as the cornerstone of any city’s live music ecology. If such gatherings are limited to a common and familiar space such as a small venue, the accumulation of social capital increases. This has implications for small live music venues as hubs for local music scenes and as contributors to civic wellbeing in general, as small venues provide space for a new kind of “sociable” (Putnam 2000, p. 19): the live music event.

Small live music venues allow for regular participation while also remaining a reliable space for scenes to congregate around:

The use of [scene] here reveals the social transit that recreates these spaces from ordinary urban materials: rooms with public address systems and bars. Within scene research, the mythology of ‘the local venue’ is often repealed, much like the local scenes around them (Bennett and Rogers 2016a, p. 28)

Rather than bolstering myths of authenticity and the extraordinary, ethnographers of music scenes cast light on the mundane exchanges of social
and cultural capital fundamental to a music scene’s operation. These are the “moments of seemingly purposeless sociability” (Straw 2001, p. 250), which make up the ‘everyday’ of local music scenes. As a colloquialism for these exchanges, ‘scene’ serves to hide the mundanity of what is going on: encounters between participants with mutual interests in a common space and/or place.

This chapter has analysed the music scene of Melbourne’s inner-north as it is articulated across two small venue spaces. As demonstrated, a local live music scene is a network of social agents—scene participants—participating in music-making and live music consumption in a variety of spaces in a specific geographical area. In regard to my analysis of a scene, these spaces are The Old Bar and The Tote, two venues that are significant as meeting spaces and performance sites in Melbourne’s inner-north.

Participants in live music scenes frequent venues, rehearsal spaces, record stores, recording studios, and other musical spaces. Scene participants demonstrate fluidity in their participation, often engaging in multiple scenes across a variety of spaces and doing so via a multitude of roles that may blur the divide between their personal and professional lives. In keeping with post-subcultural understandings of identity, their participation is ephemeral and is only a marker of identity in as long as they are actively engaged with the scene.

This chapter has analysed how the interactions and exchanges of capital between scene participants, their habitus, and the way in which this habitus interacts with and influences the scene’s social field, constructs the scene itself. Scenes consist of participants networking, socialising, and interacting in a cultural space, and along observable social pathways. However, this definition of scene does not give consideration to the
materiality of venue spaces, nor to those social actors that operate outside of the scene yet still have an effect on it. As a concept, the live music ecology is better suited to such forms of analysis, and it is in small venue spaces that the live music ecology and local music scenes intersect. By analysing the various roles that scene participants take on as they interact with and move through venue spaces, this chapter demonstrates how small venue spaces act as social hubs for live music scenes. This chapter concludes my data analysis, demonstrating in qualitative terms the benefits of my case study venues and others like it, in Australia and abroad.
As I peer into the dimly-lit interior of The Tote, I catch the eye of the venue’s cleaner: former bar manager of The Tote and Batpiss drummer Marty Baker. Tapping on the glass, he notices me and opens the venue door, greeting me with a grin and a handshake. The Tote seems surreal in daylight hours, as the thin rays of light streaming in through the grubby windows illuminate the otherwise dark corners of this rambling old building, so that ancient posters otherwise obscured can be seen clearly. A sense of history, heritage, and an all-pervading dankness is also keenly felt, as if the dust floating through the air has just been unsettled for the first time in aeons, and is making its way back to the sticky carpet and the torn felt of the pool table from which it was just disturbed.

Marty offers me a beer, which I politely decline. Over the course of our chat, he starts pointing out the old gig posters that cover almost every exposed surface of the venue’s interior. Some are advertising recent performances, their colours vibrant and the date of performance either upcoming or just gone. Others have been up for years, occasionally decades, and are fading and torn at the edges. Marty explains that most of these posters were plastered up by himself, and were chosen based on either their visual aesthetic or whether the bands featured are friends of his (or more importantly, the venue itself). As I look around I am startled to discover that a poster for a show at which I had performed is plastered just above the front bar, but on an angle that can only be viewed by those behind the bar. It was my old band Nikko’s only show in The Tote’s main band room: a performance that was a high point for the band and one which was also recorded and released commercially. Following this discovery, Marty pulls out a box of old posters, one of many sitting in The Tote’s upstairs storeroom. To my further surprise, we find a number of alternate posters for the same show that had been kept in the venue’s haphazard poster collection. To know that my old band had somehow been enshrined in the venue’s living heritage, plastered in unseen corners and kept in damp boxes in the building’s cavernous
ceiling, filled me with a mix of pride and nostalgia, such is the significance of The Tote for local musicians such as myself.

– Reflections from fieldnotes, 13 September 2015, 2pm
Chapter 6 - Conclusion

This thesis responds to the research question: *what is the social and cultural value of The Old Bar and The Tote in the live music ecology of Melbourne’s inner-north?*

Throughout my analysis chapters, it has been shown that small live music venues such as The Old Bar and The Tote are important social hubs and community spaces for local music scenes. They are spaces wherein audience members and performers socialise and network, creating connections, both personal and professional.

Scene participants gather at The Old Bar and The Tote to mingle, converse, and participate in the live music experience as well as engaging with their fellow scene participants, contributing to a sense of place that informs the collective identity of these venue spaces. Through their diverse professional, creative, and social roles, scene participants contribute to the continuity, familiarity, and history that suffuses the small venue spaces of Melbourne’s inner-north. Space and place play a large role in these constructions of meaning and identity, as venues provide a spatial grounding for the interactions that make up live music scenes. As outlined in Chapter Three, ‘place’ gives live music venues context, grounding them in a social history influenced by local identities and cultural movements. Furthermore, scene participants accumulate social and cultural capital through regular engagement with venue-based music scenes and a distinct sense of belonging shared between scene participants, which is tied to not only place but the venue spaces themselves, as discussed in Chapter Four.

The small live music venues of Melbourne’s inner-north house local music scenes that are at once both discrete and porous. They offer refuge to scene participants, albeit those with a distinct sense of shared social and cultural capital. As demonstrated in Chapter Five, small venues act as hubs for music scene participants; spaces of socialisation and play that are centred
around the live music experience. These spaces enable social interactions that go beyond the audience/performer dynamic, allowing for a sense of intimacy and affinity between musicians and other participants.

Although there are certain grounds for participation that limit acceptance in these spaces, participants frequently cited familiarity and inclusivity as being meaningful in their experiences:

It’s the middle of everywhere. All these places are right in the middle. All my friends work here or have worked here. There’s always someone here that you know. It’s okay to come here by yourself; you know you’ll know someone straight away. It’s good. (Katie Drane, interview)

Basically most of the people that we actually hang out with now are people that we’ve met through these pubs. All our old friends we’re still friends with but they don’t go out very often anymore, but the people that we’ve met through the pubs still seem to be out and about, which is great, because so are we. (Jo Gardiner, regular/DJ, interview)

The Old Bar and The Tote are framed as community spaces by participants such as these; as the intersection of an imagined Venn diagram made up of a variety of personally significant social circles and professional roles. The ease with which participants socialise in these spaces is based on regular engagement and accumulated social capital. As Old Bar regular and Tote bartender Katie Drane points out: “[y]ou can always come in, it’s always going to be the same as well, which is good. Nothing—[no] sudden changes here, it’s good. It’s comfy” (Katie Drane, interview). The sense of familiarity implicit in Drane’s statement is one that builds only with regular participation in a local scene; the continued generation and mobilisation of social and cultural capital. Inclusion in local music scenes has to be earned. Those that frequent these spaces become further entrenched in the scene, gaining alternative forms of capital, which can be valued in the form of personal recognition, contributing to their status in the field. Therefore, the social value of The Old Bar and The Tote is shown in the way that these
small venues facilitate sociality between scene participants, as well as the sense of belonging and familiarity found in these spaces by participants, as demonstrated throughout my analysis chapters.

Further, as well as providing social hubs for music scenes, small live music venues such as The Old Bar and The Tote also offer emerging musicians with valuable performance sites, making small venues vital ‘stepping-stones’ in the careers of developing artists and performers. These venues serve as performance spaces for budding musicians, providing opportunities for local up-and-coming bands to establish themselves and build a following. My case study venues—The Old Bar and The Tote—are indicative of small venue spaces; entry-level and middle-tier band rooms where new and promising artists are able to make space for themselves in the local live music scene. These spaces serve as the bottom-rung of a value-chain of venues that leads to bigger stages and more opportunities. We can consider this value-chain in ecological terms, with small venues serving as the grassroots spaces that encourage the niche cultural production necessary to maintain a sustainable live music culture and the development and proliferation of local music scenes more generally. Small live music venues are centres for a constellation of participants working in and around local music scenes: musicians, sound engineers, hospitality staff, creative industries professionals, and live music enthusiasts. These participants make up a community that is both ‘lived’ and ‘imagined’, with the physical and symbolic walls of each venue forming a nexus of social space, emphasising the role of space and sociality in these scenes.

In addition to their value as performance sites, these venues also hold their own intrinsic cultural value inherent in the actual venue spaces themselves. Their materiality, sense of space, and the surrounding place in
which they find their context, is also imbued with objectified cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986, p. 50). This includes the posters on the walls, the iconography of the venue’s visual aesthetic, the atmosphere of the venue space itself, and the ambiance that imbues these spaces and their neighbourhoods with a distinctive identity and sense of character, as outlined in Chapters Three and Four. In this context, cultural capital does not necessarily have to be possessed by a social agent, but can instead be embedded in material objects; objectified, as not only economic capital “momentarily imprisoned” (Massey 1994, p. 136), but as cultural capital tied-up in the spatial fix of buildings and other objects. The staff, owners, and management of small venues play a large role in imbuing venue spaces with this objectified cultural capital, which can otherwise be determined as a type of cultural value.

The social space of music scenes intersects with the materiality of the live music ecology, and small live music venues are prime examples of this intersection, embodying the social and cultural value of live music in their spatial coding and utility as social hubs and performance sites for local musicians and music scene participants. Further, the value of this kind of objectified cultural capital is inherent in its conversion, which can only occur through an expression of agency. This value, both social and cultural, affirms small venues such as The Old Bar and The Tote as the foundation of a city’s live music ecology, but is also what these venues exchange for economic capital in order to remain profitable and sustainable.

In answering the research question, what is the social and cultural value of The Old Bar and The Tote in the live music ecology of Melbourne’s inner-north?, it has also been revealed that the nexus between a small venue’s dual roles of encouraging social interaction and facilitating emerging musical activity
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means that the experiences that take place in these spaces are vital to a city’s greater cultural life. In determining the social and cultural value of small live music venues it has also been shown that these venues serve as the grassroots foundation of a city’s live music ecology. The social interactions that occur in small live music venues are integral to the live music culture of a city, as it is within and between these interactions that local music scenes are articulated, acting as the bedrock upon which the live music ecology is built. These interactions need material environments in which to occur and be articulated, something that scene theory has previously not considered at length. Further, small venues allow for the intimacy of social experience that local music scenes require in order to thrive, and therefore serve as ideal case studies for studying intersections between music scenes and the live music ecology. Without these spaces, organic music scenes would not be able to grow and flourish, as larger venues only host acts that have already proven themselves onstage and throughout the live music sector. Furthermore, large concert venues do not allow for the same kinds of intimate sociality that small live music venues afford.

Small venues are an essential component of any city’s live music ecology and are integral to the vibrancy of music scenes and the sustainability of live music cultures in general. The significance of small venues as social hubs for music scenes and as performance sites for emergent musicians is vital, and must be valued in social and cultural terms. Further, as economic capital in local, small-scale music scenes is sometimes often otherwise scarce, social and cultural value can be framed as the same types of alternative capital—social, cultural, symbolic etc.—that small venues mobilise and convert into economic capital in order to remain sustainable and profitable.
This thesis hinges on Bourdieusian notions of capital and how they are mobilised in the live music sector to generate revenue, situating The Old Bar and The Tote in a nexus between place-based live music scenes, the live music ecology, and broader ‘fields of power’ (such as the market). However, as demonstrated throughout Chapter 2, Bourdieu’s theoretical apparatus as it stands was not sufficient enough to address all the issues that arose throughout the research and analysis process. Hence, modes of understanding and analysing live music venues more specific to popular music studies—such as scene and the live music ecology—have been used in conjunction with Bourdieusian theory to explicate the social and cultural value of The Old Bar and The Tote. Such refinements and modifications to Bourdieu’s work were necessary in order to contextualise these forms of value in the broader discipline of live music research, within which scene has a long history of usage whereas the more recent assertion of a live music ecology is useful for other reasons. In utilising Bourdieu’s theories of capital, habitus, and field in tandem with scene and the live music ecology, I have been able to illustrate how these small venues mobilise and convert non-economic value forms into revenue, and to unpack the power relations demonstrated in interactions between scene participants, small venue workers, and the venue spaces themselves, all whilst explicating the role these small venues play within the live music ecology.

Conversions of social and cultural capital into economic capital are what make small live music venues sustainable, and emphasise the way in which they operate outside of traditional value chains. By prioritising live music over more financially lucrative business models, The Old Bar and The Tote demonstrate a disinterest in economic capital. However, this disinterest and the social and cultural capital generated by their alignment with live
music culture and the continued promotion of independent original music has its own social and cultural value; value that is ‘soaked up’ by the venue spaces, and drawn upon to attract revenue and economic capital.

Scene participants contribute to the social and cultural value of small venues such as The Old Bar and The Tote by investing in these spaces, both financially, socially, and emotionally. They also capitalise on this value as a sort of ‘return’ on their investment, gaining skills and experiences through their participation that provide them with access to further opportunities and wider social networks. This is especially visible in the case of local musicians, who may have started their careers performing in these small venue spaces and have since gone on to bigger stages, moving up and through the live music ecology. This is a good example of why having venues that are incrementally greater in their capacity for audiences is an indicator of the live music ecology and its usefulness as means of understanding the interdependency between venue spaces, and the effects this interdependency has on the live music culture of a city. Some of these more established musicians ‘repay the favour’ by returning to play at the small venues that gave them a start long after they have surpassed the need to perform in such spaces. These performances are usually promoted as special events that emphasise the status of these venues in the local live music ecology and demonstrate the social and cultural value of these spaces for musicians. Economic capital is deprioritised in such instances, with the bands gaining cultural and social capital in its place.

Small venues rely on complex systems of social and cultural capital and their continued exchange. Booking agents trade their social capital in order to book popular bands, which brings in economic capital. This speaks to the nature of capital as a whole; of ‘accumulated labour… which, when
appropriated on a private, i.e., exclusive, basis by agents or groups of agents, enables them to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labour” (Bourdieu 1986, p. 46). These social agents include scene participants, and the capital that they mobilise is embodied in their knowledge of local music scenes, objectified in the concert tickets they purchase, or otherwise played out through social connections. Further, social and cultural capital take an investment of either time, labour, or money to acquire, are inscribed in a variety of tangible and intangible ways, and can be reproduced in different contexts towards multiple ends (Bourdieu 1986, p. 46). The cultural capital of local music scenes—inscribed and embodied in an insider knowledge of that scene or objectified in such things as band merchandise—is often only exchangeable in the same field of practice that it is generated. Likewise, social capital gained through participation in music scenes is often specific to that field of participation and lacks the same conversion value outside of said scene/field. However, such forms of capital can still be converted into economic and symbolic capital within these fields, which can then be useful elsewhere. This is how the social and cultural value of small venue spaces is converted into economic value.

Small venue spaces offer an insight into how cultural fields are represented in both social and material spaces. In my analysis, I observed small live music venues as social spaces and commercial businesses that mobilise social and cultural capital in order to generate economic capital. These venues rely on local music scenes for this conversion, as these scenes constitute a network of social actors that regularly participate in the venue culture and live music events hosted therein, exchanging their economic capital for the opportunity to participate in said scene. Small venues mobilise social and cultural capital in order to bring economic capital (i.e. revenue)
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into the venue space. This is significant as economic capital is sometimes often otherwise scarce in local music scenes and other niche spaces of cultural production. However, it is in this social and cultural value that the worth of these venues truly lies, as spaces that provide music scenes with vital performance sites and meeting places as well as acting as the grassroots foundation of the live music ecology fundamental to the sustainability of a live music culture.

Future investigations of small live music venues, local music scenes, or live music ecologies might further examine the demographics of music scene participants themselves. If we consider the hegemony of Australia to be represented by white, Anglo-Saxon, heterosexual men, then there are certain vectors of difference that are tolerated more than others in the spaces of Melbourne’s small live music venues. In terms of diversity and difference, it seems that queer, feminist and trans identities are accepted, or are at least seen to be accepted. This acceptance is aligned with an emphasis on safe spaces, queer and female-only line-ups, and occasional queer nights. However, it is apparent that people of colour are less welcome, or at least lack the habitus needed to occupy these spaces comfortably. Furthermore, professionals and upper middle-class identities are also excluded, as a ‘No Formal Wear’ and ‘No Suits’ policy is broadly applied as a rule throughout Melbourne’s small live music venues. However, these policies seem to intersect with a wider distrust of hegemonic masculinity and it identifiers, as the ‘No Suits’ and ‘No Bucks Party’ policies adhered to by these venues is mainly utilised to keep large groups of men out of these spaces. Although this policy also applies to ‘Hens Nights’, the inclusion of a ‘No Suits’ policy frames the discourse of exclusion in terms of those visual signifiers that represent hegemonic masculinity and upper-middle class identities more
uniformly. Taking such questions of identity into consideration, it is apparent that Melbourne’s small live music venues are broadly aligned with ‘alternative nightlife’ (Gallan 2015); sites of resistance and difference wherein social and cultural capital is key and where difference is largely only tolerated if participants are different in similar ways.

Another area for future research is the economic sustainability of these small venue spaces. My research focused on qualitative data, however a study incorporating quantitative financial data would provide further insight into the commercial precarity of the live music sector. Indeed, an in-depth look at the precarious economic viability of small live music venues might further elucidate the significance of my research on their social and cultural value. Such a consideration of the purely economic factors at play would better frame the discussion around small live music venues and their place in the live music ecology.

Other recommendations for future research include additional case study venues, which could be expanded to include venues in other cities and regions, as well as musical spaces in the live music ecology other than small live music venues (such as rehearsal studios, record stores, community radio stations etc.). A holistic approach to music scene research that takes the impact of outsiders and non-scene participants into account should also be considered. In addition, an understanding of venues as unique social spaces that are influenced by both material and cultural concerns needs to be integrated into scene studies generally.

Small live music venues are integral components of any city’s live music ecology. They are spaces where people go to socialise, be with their friends, and watch live music, while also providing valuable performance sites for up-and-coming bands. However, the role of small venues in the live
music ecology has previously been overlooked. This project offers three major points of distinction to previous research.

First, my focus on The Old Bar and The Tote in the context of Melbourne’s local music scene positions my study as a multi-sited ethnography. Using two case studies has allowed me to deeply examine the value of small music venues within Melbourne’s live music ecology, as opposed to previous Australian research which has focused on individual venues or a local scene. These comparative case studies have provided a rich dataset to discuss and analyse the interdependency, overlap, and disparities that exist between these two venue spaces, which is especially pertinent given the qualitative nature of this research.

Second, most research on live music venues does not account for the generation and mobilisation of cultural and social capital in order to create revenue for these venue spaces. This ethnographic analysis of two small live music venues in Melbourne’s inner-north opens these ideas up to discussion, offering a way of valuing small venues via Bourdieusian notions of capital and power in the arts. This is noteworthy as it demonstrates that small live music venues have determinable value that precedes the accumulation of economic capital, and provides an insight into the greater social and cultural worth of these spaces, worth that need not be instrumentalised to be of importance.

Finally, studies of music scenes have overlooked the materiality of venue spaces and many are yet to integrate the concept of the live music ecology into their broader theoretical vernacular. This thesis is one of the first ethnographic accounts to use both scene theory and the more recently established notion of the live music sector as an ecology to map and evaluate both within a delineated field of practice. Through my comparative case
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studies on The Old Bar and The Tote, I have analysed the effects of place and space on each venue and have discussed how these factors intersect with the diverse roles of music scene participants, examining how they contribute to each venues’ status in the local live music ecology. By pairing an understanding of the live music sector as an ecology with the already established notion of scene, I have demonstrated how both rely on one another to give rise to a coherent live music culture that accounts for both the venue spaces themselves and social actors working inside and outside of the scene. This pairing demonstrates an advancement in theoretical approaches to understanding and analysing live music cultures by positioning local music scenes as the foundation upon which a more complex live music ecology is built.

We can view The Old Bar and The Tote as representative of small live music venues more broadly. These spaces accommodate local music scenes—made up of scene participants (musicians, hospitality staff, creative industry workers, audience members, and more)—providing these scenes with social space and the means to articulate themselves as collective identity. The sense of belonging, familiarity and consistency found in small live music venues are what makes them beloved spaces of community practice, but also explains why they are attractive to emerging musicians and scene participants looking for a place to call their own. Their value as social hubs for music scenes and as niches spaces of cultural production—important ‘stepping stone’ performance sites for budding musicians—contributes to the crucial and essential role that small live music venues perform as the grassroots foundation of a city’s live music ecology.
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Appendices

Appendix A

Interview questions included:

1. Tell me a bit about yourself.
2. How are you involved in the local music scene? In what capacity?
3. What venues do you frequent? Why? Are they associated with particular genres, scenes or subcultures?
4. What motivates you to participate in the local music scene?
5. How often do you attend live music events?
6. How has your social life been impacted by your involvement with live music?
7. Do your circle of friends share your enthusiasm for live music? How?
8. Is there a social aspect to the venues’ you frequent most often? How would you describe it?
9. What is it about these venues that lend themselves to a social atmosphere more than others?
10. How has this social element affected your live music consumption habits?
11. How has this social element affected your live music production habits?
12. How do your social interactions shape your sense of identity? Does music play a part?
13. In three to five years’ time, do you think your participation within the live music scene will increase, decrease or remain the same? Why?
Appendix B

Notice of Approval

Date: 13 January 2015
Project number: CHEAN A&B 0000019092-11/14
Project title: You’re Not Strangers If You Like The Same Band: The Social and Cultural Impact of Small Scale Live Music Venues in Brisbane and Melbourne
Risk classification: Low Risk
Investigator: Dr Shelley Brunt and Mr Samuel Whiting

Approved: From: 13 January 2015 To: 01 February 2017

I am pleased to advise that your application has been granted ethics approval by the Design and Social Context College Human Ethics Advisory Network as a sub-committee of the RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC).

Terms of approval:

1. Responsibilities of investigator
   It is the responsibility of the above investigator/s to ensure that all other investigators and staff on a project are aware of the terms of approval and to ensure that the project is conducted as approved by the CHEAN. Approval is only valid whilst the investigator/s holds a position at RMIT University.

2. Amendments
   Approval must be sought from the CHEAN to amend any aspect of a project including approved documents. To apply for an amendment please use the ‘Request for Amendment Form’ that is available on the RMIT website. Amendments must not be implemented without first gaining approval from CHEAN.

3. Adverse events
   You should notify HREC immediately of any serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants or unforeseen events affecting the ethical acceptability of the project.

4. Participant Information and Consent Form (PICF)
   The PICF and any other material used to recruit and inform participants of the project must include the RMIT university logo. The PICF must contain a complaints clause including the project number.

5. Annual reports
   Continued approval of this project is dependent on the submission of an annual report. This form can be located online on the human research ethics website on the RMIT website.

6. Final report
   A final report must be provided at the conclusion of the project. CHEAN must be notified if the project is discontinued before the expected date of completion.

7. Monitoring
   Projects may be subject to an audit or any other form of monitoring by HREC at any time.

8. Retention and storage of data
   The investigator is responsible for the storage and retention of original data pertaining to a project for a minimum period of five years.

In any future correspondence please quote the project number and project title.

On behalf of the DSC College Human Ethics Advisory Network I wish you well in your research.