

The Production and Consumption of Hospitality Space

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Abstract

The principal aim of the study is to examine the relationship between collective and individual identities and the production and consumption of hospitality. The thesis develops an ecological approach to hospitality that is simultaneously social and spatial; hospitality is understood as both process and context where social relationships and identities are articulated. It is argued that different ecologies of hospitality represent specific social orders and networks of relationships where hosts and guests simultaneously produce and consume their hospitality spaces. The study re-evaluates the experience of hospitality through a critical examination of the potential roles and/or functions of the hosts and guests.

Drawing on an extended ethnographic case study, and a series of illustrative cases, the thesis develops four lines of inquiry:

First, because commercial venues are characterised by fragmentary occupation, the study examines the basis for association and disassociation among hosts and guests through the notion of proximity.

Second, the study illustrates how common understandings (myths) are produced through performative and semiotic strategies inside and outside the hospitality contexts. These myths act as the ideological focal points around which potential participants gather but are also part of exclusionary practices that reflect social positions and practices of identification.

Third, the thesis examines the specific roles of hosts and guests in producing hospitality ecologies. This is simultaneously concerned with the performative strategies of hosts and guests within the hospitality context and the potential roles of guests as marketing agencies. Specific emphasis is placed on the power relationship between hosts and guests in producing a social order within hospitality space.

Lastly, I argue that boundaries and exclusion are an essential part of hospitality production and consumption. The thesis illustrates the significance of exclusionary practices of potential participants, and those dissenting, in producing hospitality ecologies.

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Introduction

When I came to study hospitality and tourism as an undergraduate, I had naïve expectations about what this would involve. I assumed the study of hospitality and tourism meant the study of the business of hospitality and tourism. Like most people, my understanding of these fields came from being a relatively uninformed consumer and a transitional low-income employee. When reading the course outline, the lofty academic subjects were overshadowed by terms like ‘operations’, ‘strategic’ and ‘management’.

It was no surprise to get lectures on operations management, strategic planning, finance, and human resource management. We studied menu-planning, preparation, cooking and even spent three months working in a ‘training restaurant’. However, we also studied organisational behaviour, marketing and economics. More importantly, as part of the leisure and tourism subjects, we learned about sociology, anthropology, political economy and geography. Seeing hospitality, leisure and tourism from these diverse perspectives made understanding the nature of their production and consumption infinitely more interesting. Since then, I have come to appreciate that such a multidisciplinary approach is essential to understanding hospitality; and consequently, this eclecticism has informed every aspect of my research.

The principal aim of this research was to examine critically the relationship between collective and individual identities, and the production and consumption of hospitality within specific cultural groups. In doing this, I set out to open up new lines of sociological inquiry concerning the role of hospitality in contemporary culture. The intention was to perpetuate emerging debates within hospitality research, transcending the perceptions that it is simply an economic activity or a set of organisational problems.

The research had a number of objectives. The first was to understand the way hospitality is produced and consumed. I began by considering the different understandings of hospitality from a theoretical perspective. In part, I was concerned with the contexts in which hospitality took place. Simultaneously, I questioned what is involved in hospitality exchanges, which led me to examine the link between hospitality, as social relationships based on exchange, and social organisation.

The second objective was a direct extension of the previous point. A number of writers (Maffesoli 1996, Turner 1969) have argued that people gather to form groups, based on feelings of commonality and shared interest. I questioned the way people use certain commercial hospitality venues to form relationships, alliances and associations. In particular, how these hospitality contexts, and the production/consumption of hospitality, facilitate or hinder social organisation.

The third objective was to consider how people identify themselves through their choices concerning how (and where) they consume hospitality. The basic assumption is that acts of consumption are never neutral (Bourdieu 1984, 1990, Douglas 1996, Douglas and Isherwood 1979); therefore, during every act of consumption people choose something and simultaneously reject other options. The choices of individuals, acting alone, and as part of social groups, reflect certain positions on a social map. Consuming hospitality in particular contexts, and engaging in specific rituals of production and consumption, consequently reflect individual and group values.

The fourth objective that drove my research was to question the roles that boundaries play during the consumption of hospitality, whether in a social or a commercial context. Hospitality is usually associated with notions of 'belongingness' and inclusion. However, the research examined the potential functions of exclusion and differentiation within the production and consumption of hospitality.

The fifth objective was to question how space (understood to possess both physical properties and symbolic characteristics) influences people's behaviour. I was concerned with how consumers interact with, and actively influence the places in which they consume. Moreover, how space is actively constructed and transformed throughout the production and consumption of hospitality.

The sixth objective was closely linked to all the previous points. I examined the way people form certain perceptions of venues, and how these perceptions influence their consumption habits. Shields (1991) argued that places develop a series of place-myths, which are understood as recurring sets of images and narratives associated with a place. The research questioned how these 'myths' form, how myths come to be disseminated, and how they influence people's behaviours.

The research was essentially ethnographic although the reader should not expect an ethnography in the traditional sense. Instead, I have used ethnographic methods to address the specific issues laid out above. Throughout my research, I visited a range of different venues although I focus on one extended case study within the thesis. This made it possible to consider the changing nature of social relationships more intensely. However, I have also included a number of shorter illustrative cases that help address emerging issues.

Within the next section, I will outline some the key themes in hospitality research and offer a critical overview of how different disciplines have contributed to the debates. The following section suggests a synthesis of these approaches and proposes a new research agenda for hospitality research; while the final section outlines the structure of the thesis and how it develops this research agenda.

Contemporary perspectives on hospitality

Reading many of the textbooks and journals with hospitality in the title, the managerial focus remains obvious. Debates concerning cultural or social aspects usually appear as token commentary chapters, or instrumental PEST analyses. Intensive, critical exploration of hospitality as essentially culturally defined social experience has been largely been ignored by hospitality academics. Contributions from teachers of hospitality to broader academic debates concerning the sociality of hospitality are rare and remain largely theoretical (Brotherton, 1999, Burgess 1982, Lashley and Morrison et al 2000, Wood 1994, 2000). These authors have been primarily concerned with defining the meanings of hospitality in order to help outline the scope of hospitality management as an academic subject.

As Lashley (2000) noted, hospitality academics have tended to draw on organisational models and managerial approaches in understanding hospitality. The study of hospitality is driven by a commercial agenda; specifically, how the production and consumption of services can be made more profitable. This is not to say the social and cultural aspects have been ignored; however, they have only been considered as far as they influence commercial objectives. For example, how social and cultural factors affect consumer motivations and perceptions of products and services. Alternatively, how social and cultural factors inside and outside the organisation influence the performance of producers, especially frontline staff. Understanding these dimensions of hospitality has enabled academics to develop more efficient marketing and human resource strategies.

Consequently, academic studies of hospitality and hospitality management serve a narrow set of commercial interests. This not only places limits on what can be known about hospitality in broader society, but also limits who benefits from this knowledge.

These studies do not necessarily enrich our understanding of society or inform a broader cultural critique. Instead, they provide conceptual tools and methodologies that enable social inequalities and exploitation to be organised more efficiently.

The social significance of hospitality has traditionally been a subject for anthropologists (Douglas 1987 et al, Malinowski 1932, Mauss 1954, Selwyn 1979, 2000, Uchendu 1964), and occasionally, social historians (Heal 1990). These studies have explored the various ways hospitality manifests itself and its functions in creating and maintaining social relationships. The focus was on the significance of hospitality exchange as it reflects the shared values or moral philosophies of groups and classes, and the socio-political and socio-economic implications of these acts.

Anthropological studies of 'potlatch', a particular system of feasting and gift giving among Northwestern American societies (Barnett 1938, Ringel 1979), and analogous forms of reciprocal exchange relationships (cf. Rubel and Rosman 1971, Stevenson 1937), have linked hospitality to issues of power and status. Among extended networks of people, material, but more importantly, symbolic exchange has been used to affirm social position and mutually recognised obligations linked to social hierarchies. Hosts drew their guests into longitudinal relationships with their hospitality, as guests were obliged to reciprocate.

Riches (1984) for example, contended that social groups celebrated their access to resources, and its associated prestige, through public display of giving. Riches argued that prestige was not the end itself, but the celebration of prestige through acts of hospitality was a means to an end: this end being the enhanced standing of the whole community. For Riches, and the anthropologists I referred to above, the production and consumption of hospitality was central to the construction of social orders and the process of social ordering.

Thorstein Veblen (1998), though not strictly an anthropologist, similarly emphasised the role of feasting in status marking and social emulation in western societies. Hosting social gatherings were opportunities to demonstrate access to economic capital, but also social and cultural capital. Moreover, the guests partaking in this hospitality had an equally important role: by accepting this hospitality, guests acknowledged and reaffirmed the host's standing, while they ensured their own social emulation by drawing on the host's prominence. Those affiliated with the host increased their demonstrable access to social capital, which then strengthened their collective status as a 'leisure class'.

Sociological studies of hospitality have tended to concentrate on the significance of food and dining cultures (Beardsworth and Keil 1997, Finkelstein 1989, Mennel et al 1992, Murcott et al 1983 and Wood 1995). Similarly to the studies I referred to above, sociologists have been concerned with the implications of food and eating habits on social organisation. In particular, how culinary habits reflect social status and identification within social groups or classes. Warde and Marteen's (2000) study of family dining habits is particularly useful because it attempted to consider simultaneously the social and commercial aspects of food consumption. The issue was no longer *what* people consumed but *where* they consumed it and how this reflected *who* they were.

Although not fully developed in their work Warde and Marteen's introduced a spatial dimension to hospitality's production and consumption, which has received relatively little critical attention. More recently, geographers have begun to address the relationship between food and space. For Bell and Valentine (1997) notions of identity are defined in terms of spatial locations, and the production and consumption of food helps to structure and articulate identities. Although they were not concerned with

hospitality per se, their consideration of food, as symbolically important matter within exchange rituals, entangled issues of power, status and mutual obligation.

Valentine (2002) has taken this further by considering the relationship between food, space and organisational contexts. Food, and the spaces in which they are consumed and exchanged, clearly structure working relationships both within organisational geographies and outside of them. For example, meals within the workplace are defined temporally and spatially as non-work where identities and power relationships between workers are affirmed. These relationships then extend into other leisure contexts away from the organisation. Simultaneously, eating and drinking with colleagues outside of work also defines relationships within organisational spaces, despite being located outside of them. The usefulness of Valentine's work is the way notions of space become a critical aspect of understanding both identity and hospitality. Moreover, how the problems of identity and space are used to understand the commercial organisation of hospitality. Unfortunately, the focus within Valentine's work, as with most sociological studies of hospitality, is on food and eating at the expense of drinking.

The relationships between the social aspects of hospitality and drinking have also been the subject of a number of ethnographic and sociological studies (Adler, M. 1991, Cavan 1963, 1966, Clinard 1962, Fox 1993, Gottlieb 1957, Mass Observation 1987, Katovich and Reese 1987, LeMasters 1975, Smith 1983, 1985). Building on a symbolic-interactionist tradition, the central theme for the majority of these studies has been the role of commercial drinking venues (bars, pubs and taverns) as culturally functional spaces that facilitate particular forms of social organisation. Licensed establishments were treated as symbolic and physical common grounds: at once public and accessible, but also private, power laden spaces. These spaces are characterised by mutually defined and continually reasserted norm governed behaviours, with necessary obligations and boundaries. Licensed venues facilitate the formation of social groups

and become the focal point for potential communal sentiment; issues of power and social status emerge alongside notions of identity, belongingness and social distinction. Interestingly, the majority of these studies have focused primarily on the social aspects of commercial hospitality above managerial or organisational issues. Conversely, intensive studies of organisational and workplace cultures in the service industry have paid limited attention to consumers (Mars and Nicod 1984, Marshall 1986, Paules 1996, Shamir 1981, Spradley and Mann 1975, Whyte 1949).

Interestingly, within these studies, issues of identity, status and power have remained central themes. Within commercial hospitality contexts, management and operational staff are caught in complex power struggles as they pursue diverse and often conflicting agendas. Management are assumingly profit oriented and rely on frontline staff for consistent product delivery. Commercial hospitality operates through the appropriation and commodification of the personalities and the physical bodies of service staff (Crang 1994). Presentations of self within the service encounter draw on notions of empathy, passivity and servility; meanwhile, staff potentially become objectified as sexual objects to be gazed at. Therefore, along with the emotional selves, physical sexual selves become consumables within the hospitality experience.

However, though frontline staff may be expected to assume subordinate, servile roles, they have opportunities to construct alternative, potentially empowered selves as they produce the experience of hospitality space. For example, by ridiculing the guests, or slowing down the service, staff negotiate working conditions in order to pursue their own interests and articulate identities in opposition to those prescribed by management. The usefulness of these organisationally focused ethnographic studies is the way they have explored the intricacies of the hospitality encounter. They have considered how seemingly insignificant details, the presentation of emotions for example, critically influence the whole experience. Furthermore, how the hosts and guests both renegotiate

their identities through the consumption experience. Unfortunately, these studies often pay limited attention to broader social, political and economic conditions that position both hosts and guests. Considering these broader issues would help to understand the motivations of hosts and guests and also help explain why hospitality exchange takes particular forms.

These anthropological, sociological and geographical studies reflect the conceptual grounding for my research. Despite considering diverse contexts, they demonstrate that notions of identity and the problems of social organisation are closely entangled with hospitality's production and consumption. Furthermore, these studies also show that issues of identity and social organisation are important in social and commercial settings.

Within the next section, I will draw on these academic perspectives in order to develop a synthesised research agenda and outline how specific issues are addressed within this thesis.

First, following the anthropological tradition, it is essential to question what is being produced and consumed, by whom, within commercial hospitality spaces. Hospitality may be a social process, but it is important to recognise that commercial contexts are important sites for the articulation of identities, for those producing and consuming the experience.

Chapters 5, 7 and 8 in particular, offer detailed accounts of what hospitality exchange involves, and what form it takes. I am primarily concerned with the mechanics of hospitality as social process and examine how hospitality, as social action, determines social organisation – how it is used to unite some people and divide others.

This last point is particularly important; hospitality is often considered through notions of inclusion. However, considering notions of inclusion alone are inadequate for understanding hospitality's production and consumption. Anthropological and

sociological studies have emphasised the way hospitality is used to emphasise hierarchical differentiation and social distinction. All acts of inclusion, giving and sharing, place limits on who is included and how they can partake in hospitality. Consequently, the forms and implications of hospitality can only be fully interpreted by understanding the basis of asymmetrical participation and exclusion.

Second, it is equally important to question the understandings that determine the form hospitality takes. It is a mistake to reduce commercial hospitality to any one of its physical components (i.e. food or drink). After all, even in the commercial context, hospitality remains a social experience linked to shared meanings. This is not to say all hospitality exchange has explicit meanings attached to it; nor do I assume all social actions are conscious acts of communication. Nevertheless, hospitality, in all its forms, is open to interpretation. Furthermore, because hospitality is part of social organisation, there are always certain knowledges and understanding bound up in its production or consumption, even if they are not immediately evident or coherent.

The discussion on myths in chapters 2 and 6, questions the way knowledge and mutual interest forms outside and inside hospitality contexts. I question how understandings, developed outside particular contexts, re-emerge within hospitality contexts, which then determines the nature of hospitality exchange and the process of social organisation. I simultaneously question how knowledge and understandings, which develop within specific contexts, through hospitality exchange, then operate beyond the immediate context. Within chapters 6 and 7, I will examine how these understandings are reproduced through specific actions and representational practices. Lastly, returning to the problems of exclusion, I will consider how, and why, certain understandings are legitimised and reproduced while others are suppressed or expelled.

Third, while a contextualised interactionist approach is essential to understanding the mechanics of hospitality, the analysis cannot be limited to this. Explanations of why

hosts or guests engage in certain forms of hospitality must simultaneously be sought outside of the immediate organisational contexts. Consequently, I approach particular exchange relationships through a holistic critique; I will question how hospitality, as actions and understandings, reflect power relationships underpinned by broader social, economic and political tensions. My principal research site was a sexualised space, therefore, I will question how sexual dissidence determines how identities are articulated, how such sexual dissidents organise themselves socially, and how hospitality determines these processes.

Fourth, hospitality, as social action linked to shared understandings, is a spatial phenomenon. Consequently, hospitality cannot be understood without considering the locations in which it is produced and consumed. Therefore, I will examine how the perceived qualities of hospitality spaces determine, and are determined by, people's hospitality exchanges.

The production and consumption of hospitality space is linked to the mobilisation of resources and particular capabilities. Within sociological studies, resources usually referred to money and social contacts, while capabilities, to the knowledge of decorum and etiquette. I will examine how particular resources and capabilities are entangled with specific hospitality spaces, and how they facilitate or hinder the articulation of identities. This is used to consider how identities, and understandings bound up in identities, are spatialised through the production and consumption of hospitality.

My overall intention is to develop a holistic understanding of hospitality that is at once social and spatial, while developing a conceptual framework that synthesises organisational and social perspectives. To do this I am introducing the notion of ecology to understand hospitality as both context and process. The idea of ecology simultaneously implies both location and a living entity linked to its surroundings, which must be thought of in terms of all that exists within and without them. Ecologies

are dynamic bionetworks of relationships that are constantly reconfigured in their reproduction. The aim is to understand how these ecologies are continuously produced, performed and consumed within symbolic and physical topographies.

Ecologies of hospitality reflect a relational existence: the different scales of hospitality, and the different contexts of hospitality, are treated as interrelated elements. Interpersonal exchanges of hospitality, involving the smallest social units, the dyad, are conceptualised in relation to larger productive forces. Individual exchanges are understood through complex networks of social, political, ideological, economic and organisational relationships. This holistic approach can bridge the divide between the theoretical abstractions of social science and the essentialist tendencies of managerialism.

I am concerned here with two particular aspects of hospitality. First, the social orders associated with different types of hospitality exchanges; and second, the obligations associated with maintaining particular social orders.

Hunter (1985) defined three types of social order: the private, the parochial and the public, which can be said to be associated with certain types of social contexts. These different types of social orders are characterised according to the nature of social ties and obligations. In the private realm, obligations are based on friendship and kinship ties dependent on intimate emotional and affective qualities. The public social order is reliant on more distanced relationships set around mutual civility and duties associated with citizenship. The parochial social order is intermediate, relying on the coexistence of networks of people with mutual interests. These stretch beyond civil agreements but are not necessarily intimate private relationships.

I will argue that the construction of particular ecologies of hospitality relies on the continuous production (and consumption) of specific social orders. The private and parochial social orders of hospitality spaces are produced in opposition to discourses of

public social orders. These social orders are determined by the reproduction of specific social norms, partly by controlling the behaviours of those participating, but also by excluding people who undermine these processes. This in turn relies on common understandings that have a relatively coherent ideological basis. In mobilising specific ideologies, those constructing the experience of hospitality mobilise specific sets of obligations from potential participants or consumers. In doing so, these obligations transform the host-guest relationship as guests take an active part in constructing the very ecologies they are consuming. For both hosts and guests, their performances of selves, simultaneously determine, and are determined by, the hospitality ecologies they produce and consume.

The study has concentrated on a series of commercial venues, but the principal focus has remained on the social aspects of hospitality. I have distinguished between the different organisational obligations of social and commercial hospitality. However, I am arguing that it is only possible to understand the commercial organisation of hospitality by critically examining the social aspects of hospitably production and consumption. Consequently, I am arguing that it is misleading to distinguish between the commercial, social and private or personal aspects of hospitality exchange. Issues of cultural and individual identity, social status, power, mutually defined norms and obligations are evident in all the various contexts of hospitality and at every scale. The ecological approach reflects how these different contexts of hospitality, and the different scales of hospitality, must be considered holistically. This holistic approach can offer a broader understanding of commercial hospitality, while demonstrating the sociological implications of hospitality exchange in contemporary, urban, western European societies.

The thesis is organised in the following way. The first chapter sets out the epistemologies that inform the research. I have drawn on a Russian school of social

linguistics and use the notion of dialogue as a metaphor for broader cultural practices. Dialogue implies movement as opposed to fixity and rigidity, which makes it appropriate to understand the shifting nature of social organisation. Hospitality encounters in the commercial context are typically ephemeral and characterised by movement so it is necessary to employ a more flexible approach to cultural organisation. The metaphor of dialogue makes it possible to consider how issues of power change the nature of social practices. More specifically, how centripetal and centrifugal forces operate among specific configurations of people.

Chapter 2 sets out the theoretical discussions that underpin the research; it is split into six thematic areas. I will begin with a critical discussion on the definitions and implications of hospitality relationships. The second section offers a critical introduction to the notion of myths. Drawing on Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of 'speech genres', I argue that myths are common understandings that simultaneously form through human actions and broader representational practices. The third section explores the problems of social organisation through Michel Maffesoli's concept of 'neo-tribes' and Victor Turner's 'communitas'. I introduce the notion of 'social proximity' to consider how association is articulated among networks of people, often through ephemeral encounters. The fourth section explores notions of identity and identification. More specifically, how individual identification is linked to the problems of social organisation. My principal field location was a bar with a large gay and lesbian clientele. Consequently, the discussion introduces a number of critical debates concerning sexuality, and the relationship between sexuality and identity.

Drawing on Henri Lefebvre's 'spatial dialectic', the fifth part simultaneously considers space as a physical entity, social practices, abstract capital relations and representational practices. The discussion incorporates the existing themes concerning identity and the need to create social spaces that facilitate the articulation of identities. The final part of

chapter 2 offers a discussion on the problems of ideology and introduces the notion of a 'dialogic memory' in considering the way knowledge is reproduced within the production and consumption of hospitality space.

Chapter 3 sets out the contexts of the research; it begins by offering a discussion on the primary research site: the *Freelands*, and the reasons it was chosen for the study. The second part of the chapter examines the ownership and management of the *Freelands* as a commercial organisation. Furthermore, in line with the ecological approach of the thesis, I discuss the relationship between the *Freelands* and the social and political ecology of the area where it was located. The final part of chapter 3 introduces a second research site: the *Temple*; I offer a critical discussion on the organisation of the *Temple* as commercial venture and social experience.

Chapter 4 sets out the methodology of the research and specific emphasis is placed on ethical debates and the difficulties of my fieldwork. The data was drawn from extended participant observation and a series of semi-structured interviews. Due to the contexts in which I met informants, it was not always possible to be overt. Consequently, I provide a lengthy discussion on the problems of field relations. More importantly, I consider how my position, as a heterosexual male researcher, influenced both the relationships in the field and the data gathered.

Chapter 5 returns to the problem of social proximity which I introduce in chapter 2. In short, proximity concerns the way people feel about each other, whether closeness or distance. I set out to illustrate how proximity relations operated within the production and consumption of hospitality. Just as configurations of consumers shifted, the relationship between these networks of individuals changed. The concept of proximity allowed me to consider how social association (or distance) operated without falsely reifying a coherent social entity. Instead of attempting to identify fixed social units, considering proximity allowed me to understand the *basis on which social units or*

groups formed. This was necessary in order to understand how social positions, and networks based on social positions, operated and changed over time.

Chapter 6 expands upon the problem of myths and considers three sets of myths evident in the bar: the myths of commonality, safety and play. I examine how these myths formed, how they were maintained, and how they changed over time; my aim is to question how people positioned themselves in relation to these myths and how this reflected their sense of identification.

The second part of the chapter considers the nature of 'place-images' that informed the myths surrounding the place, and the semiotic practices of the owners/managers (as the producers of experience). The final section of the chapter questions the way cultural knowledge was organised among consumers and how this related to the problem of 'place-images' and 'place-myths'.

Chapter 7 focuses on the specific roles of individuals in creating the experience of hospitality. I begin by considering the role of the managers and staff (as hosts) in creating the social atmosphere, before examining the role that guests had in producing the experience. The discussion examines the social positions of the guests and the way this influenced their ability to contribute to the consumption environment.

The second part of the chapter develops the theme of guest-as-host and consumer-as-producer. In part, this considers how consumers acted as marketing channels – disseminating information about the venue. Simultaneously, I examine the importance of consumers bringing people to hospitality venues. I argue that guests/consumers acted as a filter system and a means of control where they directly influenced the social order of the space.

Chapter 8 focuses on issues of boundaries and considers the necessity for exclusion in the production of hospitality space. I discuss different forms of boundaries and practices of exclusion and argue that certain boundaries operated within the social space while

others operated outside. Some people were excluded, while others excluded themselves as they articulated their sense of identities and social positions. Boundaries were at once a reflection of proximity relations and broader social and political issues concerning status and belongingness.

The conclusion draws out a number of emerging themes concerning the relationship between identities, myths, hospitality spaces and consumer/producer or host/guest relationships. The final part of the chapter discusses how specific themes distilled from this study can contribute to knowledge and inform future research: First, I illustrate how studies of hospitality can inform debates in broader academic disciplines; and then, suggest how emergent themes can advance the overall study of hospitality as both social and commercial enterprise.

Having introduced the background to the research, the aims and objectives of the study, and the structure of the thesis, my initial task is to develop the theoretical components of my argument. Therefore I will begin by outlining the epistemologies of my thesis in chapter one.

Chapter 1 Epistemologies

Language is my starting point. More specifically, the very essence of language is my starting point. I do not intend to pursue a narrow social linguistic analysis, but instead, use the metaphors of language and dialogue as part of a literary strategy to create a sense of textual ambience. A central problem for any ethnographic study is how to produce coherent representations of potentially incoherent social realms. Appropriate representations of social ambiances emerge through the construction of textual ambiances. Because culture is characterised by seemingly conflicting themes of coherence and idiosyncrasy, language and dialogue in particular, act as rich and readily accessible metaphors that help interpret these conflicting cultural processes.

As a system, language connects individual agents with other agents and broader institutions; it relies on shared meanings and rules, but at the same time, it is dynamic and open to idiosyncratic manipulation. Drawing on the social linguistics of Mikhail Bakhtin (1935/1981, 1953/1986) and Valentin Vološinov (1929/1986), I am arguing that by considering the characteristics of language, purely as an intersubjective system, language becomes an appropriate metaphor for cultural processes.

Language is a social phenomenon; it functions through collective agreement. Socially organised agents 'agree' as to how they employ specific words, and how they assign meaning to specific utterances. In the same way, groups of people assign the meanings of specific actions, or objects in cultures; cultural knowledge is therefore *interindividual*. However, just as the meanings of words change according to the linguistic contexts in which they appear, the perceived meaning of every act can potentially change according to the social contexts in which they occur. Therefore, to

understand the potential meanings of any human act or object, it is necessary to view them in relation to the possible meanings of other acts or objects.

Culture, just as language, is simultaneously shared and individual; it exists in a constant state of *hybridity*. There are shared norms, which allow individuals to understand each other, just as language has relatively stable sets of rules. However, culture, just as language, is also individual. People use specific combinations of actions and objects to create unique themes for their behaviour. People apply their distinctive *accents* to their utterances, and in the same way, individuals have their own 'take' on cultural norms. This *stylisation* is a way for people to create unique expressions, and subsequently, articulate their own sense of identity.

My aim is to examine how specific actions (involving speech acts and physical gestures), and cultural objects (e.g. clothing), acquire meaning for socially organised individuals within hospitality contexts. In order to question the potential meanings of actions or objects, there is a need to consider three areas. First, the collective sentiment, the mutual interests, that allow people to feel a sense of commonality with others (or not), which act as the precursors that define future hospitality exchange. Second, the shared actions and objects (essentially a system of signs) that allow people to articulate a sense of commonality or dissonance. Third, how individuals adopt, reject, translate, manipulate and transform actions or objects, as they come to identify themselves through the production and consumption of hospitality.

Within the following section, I shall continue to outline the way this linguistic metaphor helps to address the debates concerning culture and shared meaning.

Culture, signs and shared meanings

It is axiomatic to assume that culture (in all its forms) contains signs; objects, words, or even human actions may 'represent, depict, or stand for something lying outside of itself' (Vološinov 1986). "A sign does not simply exist as a part of a reality – it reflects and refracts another reality. Therefore, it may distort that reality or be true to it, or may perceive it from a special point of view and so forth" (Vološinov 1986: 10). Meanings are open to interpretation, not completely freely, but within the relative constraints of cultures. Culture is *intersubjective*, and cultural knowledge, as well as its expressions in actions or objects, is open to contestation.

Every concrete utterance of a speaking subject serves as a point where centrifugal as well as centripetal forces are brought to bear. The processes of centralization and decentralization, of unification and disunification, intersect in the utterance. [...] Every utterance participates in the "unitary language" (in its centripetal forces and tendencies) and at the same time partakes of social and historical heteroglossia (the centrifugal, stratifying forces). (Bakhtin 1981: 272)

Groups of individuals may establish collective norms among themselves (for example, ways of speaking, behaving, or understanding and knowing); however, individuals can challenge these norms in their individual actions. Culture is *multi-accented*, where individuals perform specific actions in potentially unique ways and objects become status markers and signifiers. For example, a term such as 'good' can be a positive term, or, if said in an ironic tone: 'oh, that's good', imply the opposite. In the same way, a kiss can be a token gesture of friendship, a greeting, a gesture of deeper affection, or

may be a precursor of impending harm, as in the 'kiss of death'. The meaning of a word is defined by the intonation of the speaker and the perceptions of the listener. In the context of this thesis, the meanings of actions are defined by the motivation and interpretations of the actors involved. In a similar way, a piece of clothing, worn in different ways, combined with other clothes can come to have different meanings.

There is no singular meaning to actions or objects, and this is what allows people to transform and utilise them as part of cultural communication or interaction. This of course recognises, as Campbell (1995) argued, that not every action or object is a communicative device. They may be unintentional acts of communication. Even if actions or objects are used to communicate something, there is no guarantee that it will be recognised, or even interpreted as the sender had intended. Furthermore, as Vološinov stated: "the process of understanding is on no account to be confused with the process of recognition. These are thoroughly different processes. Only a sign can be understood; what is recognised is a signal" (1986: 68). Recognition and understanding is dependent on the nature of the interaction and the sense of shared knowledge of the actors involved.

Culture as dialogue

No utterance is without a listener. This means that it is no longer possible to consider what people say, or do, giving priority to the speaker but treating the listener as a passive recipient. The necessary alternative is to consider how the listener is expected to interpret, understand and subsequently respond to any utterance.

The word in living conversation is directly, blatantly, oriented toward a future answer-word: it provokes an answer, anticipates it and structures itself in the

answer's direction. Forming itself in an atmosphere of the already spoken, the word is at the same time determined by that which has not been said but which is needed and in fact anticipated by the answering word. Such is the situation in any living dialogue. (Bakhtin 1981: 280)

Any utterance [...] makes response to something and is calculated to be responded to in turn. It is but one link in a continuous chain of speech performances. Each monument carries on the work of its predecessors, polemicizing with them, expecting active, responsive understanding, and anticipating such understanding in return. (Vološinov 1986: 72)

Cultural knowledge, cultural understanding and cultural communication works on similar principles. A specific act of an individual may not elicit an active or immediate response in the way a conversation involves response. Sometimes a human act is never commented on at all. However, the person who carries out the act does so in anticipation of some sort of response, although these responses may be passive or active.

For example, if I am going to an exclusive bar, I am likely to wear appropriately smart clothing (utterance). I wear it because it is accepted that people who go to this exclusive bar wear this kind of clothing to make a good impression (cultural knowledge). If I go to the bar well-dressed, the owner may not actively say 'well done for dressing up', but he or she is expecting me to do this (mutual understanding of that knowledge). He or she may have a different reaction were I to turn up in a T-shirt and shorts (range of responses). This rather simplistic example demonstrates that clothing (signal) may reflect neatness, conformity, or membership of a certain social group (sign). The act of dressing-up (as an act of communication) anticipates some sort of expectation or

reaction although that response may be tacit. In subcultural contexts the differentiation of signs may be subtle (for example, tightness of clothes, brand of clothing, other items of clothing it is combined with, jewellery etc.) but the relationship, based on an implicit understanding, remains.

This understanding of human relations serves to 'de-centre' the individual. The locus is no longer located within the individual but between the individual and all that is outside of him or her. As mentioned previously, this approach assumes culture is simultaneously shared and individual, existing in between the two in a state of hybridity. The relationship it shares is essentially *dialogic*. Multiple actors, who have some shared knowledge, and a shared means of cultural communication, can articulate their similarity or difference. In effect, they position themselves in relation to each other. Cultural knowledge and exchange exists in a continual process of interaction.

Following Bakhtin, Bhabha talked about 'cultural translation' where meanings are formed through the signifying practice of representation and interpretation.

Translation is also a way of imitating, but in a mischievous, displacing sense – imitating an original in such a way that the priority of the original is not reinforced but by the very fact that it *can* be simulated, copied, transferred, transformed, made into a simulacrum and so on: the 'original' is never finished or complete in itself. The 'originary' is always open to translation so it can never be said to have a totalised prior moment of being or meaning – an essence. (1990: 210)

These transformational performances of culture are everyday examples of negotiation and displacement. For Bhabha, this constant hybridisation is 'culture-in-process'. Hybridisation becomes a liminal 'third space' created from the existing two 'moments'

of culture, brought together in the process of reproduction. Through translation, the third space displaces the existing two as it sets up a new version of culture or discourse. These emergent utterances inherently distort the existing discourses from which they are constructed.

Words are accented as individuals appropriate them to create unique utterances. In the same way, dialogism assumes that actions and objects are appropriated. People place their unique accents onto them; they interpret, translate and transform their meaning. Their meanings are never fixed but fluid, and as they are re-deployed in new situations, or contexts, their meanings are potentially renewed. There are centripetal forces in culture that stabilise meanings of actions or objects, while centrifugal forces of heterogeneity and individuality destabilise.

Just as with dialogue, culture functions as a dynamic process. It is an unstable and fluid 'entity' always open to negotiation. Individual actors take up relationships with other actors, as well as with broader cultural norms and societal institutions.

This potential decentring of the individual leads on to a further set of issues concerning broader networks of relationships. I have already discussed the potential for interconnectedness and relatedness in human action through the metaphor of dialogue. I will extend on this approach by drawing on elements of 'Actor-Network Theory' (ANT) (Callon 1986, Law et al 1991, Law and Hassard et al 1999, Murdoch 1997a, 1997b, 1998, Thrift 1996).

ANT is not a singular theory, but an assortment of theories concerning the 'sociology of translation'. Translation here refers to the: "mechanisms by which the social and natural worlds progressively take form" (Callon 1986: 224). As Murdoch described it, translation is: "the processes of negotiation, representation and displacement which establish relations between actors, entities and places" (1998: 362). Actor-network studies seek to understand how seemingly insignificant heterogeneous elements in the

social and physical world interrelate to create larger totalities. The focus is on how different agents operate in relation to each other; comprehending the position or actions of one depends on understanding its relation to others (Elias 1978). ANT is an attempt to understand the relationships between heterogeneous points of agency. However, within ANT, agency is not located exclusively within the human or even the social realm. ANT attempts to map out the potential function of the non-social and non-human in society.

There appears to be traces of what Guba and Lincoln (1994) defined as 'critical realism' within actor-network studies (see also Lincoln and Guba 2000). Critical realism does not deny reality, as social constructionism seems to do, but problematises our knowledge of it. It emphasises that there is life beyond discourse and that physical objects have a reality, outside of cognitive or representational realms. Within ANT, there is an attempt to incorporate potentially non-discursive 'objects', and understand their potential influence in interrelated networks. The usefulness of ANT is in its attempt to overcome dualisms such as culture/nature, object/subject, discourse/reality, agency/structure and the individual/society. Instead, the focus simultaneously falls on different points in space and time, and the connection, or relationship between these points.

As noted above, within ANT, 'agency' simultaneously refers to the practices of individuals, groups and organisations, but practitioners of ANT seek to analyse the potential functions of the non-human/non-social. Agency is understood to be the outcome of complex networks of relationships between the human and the non-human. These networks must also include technologies and even objects, although these often cannot be considered outside of their social and political context. ANT does not necessarily give priority to the human subject; instead, ANT attempts to understand everything in terms of its connectedness or relatedness to other 'things'.

Concerning the notion of the human actor: “the argument is that thinking, acting, writing, loving, earning – all the attributes that we normally ascribe to human beings, are generated in networks that pass through and ramify both within and beyond the body. Hence the term, actor-network – an actor is also, always, a network” (Law 1992: n.p.). The individual is at once a site, and the process through which other sites come to operate. The non-human and the non-social also play intermediary roles that define the configurations of these sites. The point to note is that the human, non-human and non-social, simultaneously act on, and are acted upon, through these complex interactions or intersections. Valentine (2002) for example, explores the way food and drink is used by social agents, and, how it simultaneously structures social organisation. The actor-network approach seeks to map these complex topographies of shifting configurations and their potential nexuses.

However, the network metaphor should not necessarily be seen to imply unification or even harmony. Positions often rely on some ‘other’ for their status, which the network metaphor potentially denies (Lee and Brown 1994). However, these points are not assumed to be connected in a unified sense; notions of connectivity, relationship, or relatedness are not understood as being linear or evenly distributed. Such complex and fragmented networks of relationships are characterised by discontinuity and asymmetrical power relationships. Certain excluded or marginalised agents have fewer opportunities for participation in, and less influence on, specific networks (Star 1991). ANT is therefore an attempt to map the power relationships between specific elements and points in these networks.

The practice of power, or the projection of influence, is dependent on the ‘co-operation’ of specific agents. Moreover, the ability of individuals to function as collective entities and to assert influence relies on their ability to mobilise both the material and abstract. In part these refer to access to various sorts of capital (economic, symbolic, cultural)

and representational practices. Simultaneously, this must also include the appropriate manipulation of the physical world, specific objects for example, which may also potentially function as materialised abstractions such as cultural capital.

Within the following thesis, I have attempted to incorporate, to some extent, both the material and the abstract. Admittedly, I do not give the same emphasis to the non-social and non-human as some practitioners of ANT (e.g. Callon 1986). Nevertheless, these are recognised as an implicit part of social organisation, identification and the production and consumption of hospitality.

Actor-network theory is part of a broader set of theoretical problems and avenues concerning complexity theory and network theories in mathematics (e.g. Barabasi 2002, Buchanan 2002). These extend to understand complex hybrid configurations of human, organic and the technological aspects, which lie beyond the scope of the current discussion. For now, it is simply useful to draw on those essential features of ANT relevant here. These are the relational epistemology, the issues of connectivity and relatedness, and the problems of power in networks. ANT thus forms an intensive expansion of the dialogism that I have been attempting to set out here.

The commercial hospitality environment is characterised by temporary occupation and shifting configurations of people. The network approach allows us to consider how associations and disassociations operate in the consumption environment over time. More specifically, how forms of social organisations are determined by the social positions of individuals in relation to others. By mapping the power relationships of networks of consumers, it is then possible to examine how certain individuals are enabled or disabled from constructing or articulating their sense of identities within the social environment. By understanding the way identities are constructed, it is possible to examine the relationship between identification and the production or consumption of hospitality.

Dialogism as epistemology

Dialogism, as a principle, serves as a technique for interpreting cultural dynamics. As an epistemology, dialogism helps to understand how interpretations, and claims to knowledge, are developed (Holquist 1990). Knowledge itself is simultaneously individual and shared, it is located in that liminal space between what is internalised, interpreted and 'understood' by me, and all that is alien and outside of me. How I communicate my knowledge, and the listener/reader's perception, also determines the location and the potential 'authenticity' and 'trustworthiness' of that knowledge. This of course implies that knowledge itself is inherently unstable, fragmented and negotiated through 'dialogic' exchange.

We construct knowledge through interactions with people, objects, spaces, socio-political and economic institutions, ideologies and abstract discourses. It is about how we perceive them to exist, and how we assign them cultural meaning and value. Simultaneously, who I am, where I am 'located', in the broader sense of the term, means I have the power to affect the world around me by constructing, challenging and transforming its meanings. This does not assume individual agents have the ultimate power to organise their world; there are abstract social, political and material conditions of life that inevitably influence our relative positions. Our social positions directly influence our perceptions and our ability to resist or alter our positions. Ultimately, position is reliant on some negotiation between the individual and the world around them.

Lastly, to complete the dialogic circle, the meanings that I (as author) communicate are equally reliant on a shared understanding between the listener/reader and me. These are themselves hybridised knowledges and understandings. They are partially shared and

therefore compatible, but also individual, drawing on the speaker/listener-author/reader's social position and biography.

My epistemological position is closely aligned to a constructionist-hermeneutic-interpretivist tradition. As Schwandt (2000) set out, these three approaches are different although they share a fundamental similarity of opposing realism and positivist epistemological positions.

Positivism seeks to attain an objective version of the living world 'as it really is', providing direct and causal explanations for social phenomena. It assumes that the observer can maintain an objective position and disregard his or her own social location (with its inherent biases). As a result, positivism denies the observer's influence on what is seen and what can be known.

In opposition to this, the contrasting epistemological traditions that Lincoln and Guba have collectively called 'constructivism' (1994, 2000) assume that reality is in fact multiple.¹ It does not exist in neutral space, but assumes that members of society, operating within broader social constraints construct reality. In order to outline my epistemological position I will briefly discuss three different approaches, which are subsumed under the umbrella term constructivism. These are interpretivism, philosophical hermeneutics and the social constructionist approach. My thesis draws on all three approaches although it does not stay faithful to any.

Interpretivism assumes that human action is meaningful and in order to interrogate these meanings it is necessary to understand the system or context in which it occurs. This process of understanding involves an 'empathic identification' (Schwandt 2000: 192). The observer strives to comprehend the meanings of actions, reactions, cultural objects and the emotional state of the 'other'. Interpretivism is concerned with understanding how we come to interpret the possible meanings of our everyday world. This approach is a vital starting point, although the problem of location for the observer remains. The

focus of attention is on understanding the observed, which places the observer at a distance, outside of the context. Therefore, in doing this, the social location of the observer is effectively ignored.

Philosophical hermeneutics, particularly the work of Gadamer (1979) and Bernstein, R. (1983), seeks to account for the location of the researcher. By incorporating the position of the observer/commentator into the analysis, it acknowledges his or her associated leanings and biases. The hermeneutics tradition acknowledges that knowledge cannot be separated from the knower. The focus of the hermeneutic approach, as Gadamer set out:

is not to develop a procedure of understanding but to clarify the conditions in which this understanding takes place. [...] The prejudices and fore-meanings in the mind of the interpreter are not at his free disposal. He is not able to separate in advance the productive prejudices that hinder understanding and lead to misunderstanding. This separation, rather, must take place in the understanding itself, and hence hermeneutics must ask how it happens. (1979: 263)

Therefore, we add another layer to our sense of understanding by problematising reflexively our relationship with the alien other. More specifically, how our social location will radically alter how we encounter, interpret and understand.

The constructionist approach develops this further by positioning the observer as a simultaneous participant in living culture. Construction is an active process where social actors generate and maintain meanings in our everyday world. Our understanding of the world is inherently shared and simultaneously mediated, simply because it is not singular, unified or coherently stable. To quote Guba and Lincoln: “knowledge consist[s] of those constructions about which there is a relative consensus (or at least

some movement toward consensus) among those competent [...] to interpret the substance of construction” (1994: 113). The observer, and for want of a better term, the observed, share in some kind of reality. Consequently, the findings of the inquiry are the outcome of their interaction. These outcomes are heavily dependent on the relationship between the observer and the observed; they are partial and incomplete, contestable versions of social reality.

There are also the issues of intention and audience to contend with when considering how discourse is created, and communicated. As Potter (1996) argued, the construction of social discourse is dependent on the context in which it occurs. The form it takes depends on the intention of the author/speaker who creates it, and the potential audience. For example, when writing an academic thesis, the author anticipates that a certain audience will read it. This means that he or she assembles and articulates certain sets of thoughts, in a certain way, based on perceptions of the audience’s knowledge and expectations.

Constructivism does have a significant problem in potentially reducing everything to discourse (Burr 1995). The epistemological foundations of constructivism come to problematise the ontological status of culture and reality. What we know to exist is dependent on who the knower is and where he or she is located. All that appear to exist are multiple and relativist versions of social reality. Constructivism suggests that nothing exist outside of discourse. These: “constructions are not more or less “true,” in any absolute sense, but simply more or less informed and/or sophisticated” (Guba and Lincoln 1994: 111).

The position I adopt is similar to that of Donna Haraway (1988) who puts location at the centre of the epistemological frame. The interpretation and understanding of the social experience is undeniably fragmented and contestable. The trustworthiness and authenticity of this knowledge stems from a sense of accountability and there is an

attempt to demonstrate how I construct understanding through the process of field relationships. The knowledge claims of the research are therefore located in a specific space and time, and within an ethnographic context.

The 'situated knowledge' that Haraway talks about simultaneously locates me within the ethnographic context and questions my ability to engage with a social group. It attempts to account for how my social position directly affects the nature, and the outcomes of the inquiry. The subsequent interpretation and understanding comes as part of a reflexive process. It does not deny partiality of knowledge, or subjectivity, but seeks to build the tensions that arise into the final thesis.

This is not simply about relativism, but networks of shifting but interrelated positions. My aim is to interrogate how these positions are located in relation to each other, and how they change over time. This is inherently dialogic because it seeks to understand the *processes* by which people form and maintain cultural relations. Knowledge, however contentious or fragmented, is created through a kind of 'social dialogue'. This dialogue does not operate through language alone, but also through our actions and our material worlds. In this sense, it draws on the critical realism of actor-network theory, which seeks to account for the potential of the non-human and non-social. The material becomes part of a broader narrative. The trustworthiness and authenticity of this knowledge rests on whether I can reflexively account for the processes by which I construct this knowledge.

The final thesis comes across as a monologic utterance, as the author has the power to censor and manipulate the voices of others within the text. In this sense, as Wolf (1996) and Murphy and Dingwall (2001) agree, research can never really be mutual or equal. In certain ways, power remains in the hands of the author. However, texts, as any linguistic form, are 'polyvocal' – they contain traces of countless past utterances. Past voices intersect, converging and deflecting each other. The author makes an effort to

create atmosphere, and to describe the social experience. However, it must be recognised that the reader takes an equally important role in animating the text. The reader brings the text to life as he or she interprets and understands. It is an act of projection as much as any passive reception, where the knowledge of the reader comes to intersect with that of the author. Therefore, reflexivity is not a singular act or project; reflexivity is a mutual process, and a necessary negotiation between the author and the readers. The dialogic epistemology simultaneously becomes a conceptual tool for understanding cultural processes, while helping to assess critically how those understandings are constructed.

Having outlined the epistemologies underpinning my thesis, the following the chapter sets out the broader theoretical discussions that inform my analysis. The dialogic epistemologies developed within this chapter are used to create a more holistic and versatile conceptual framework with which to approach the issues of hospitality, social organisation, identity and spatial relations.

Notes

¹ Guba and Lincoln (1994), Lincoln and Guba (2000)

Chapter 2 Theoretical Debates

In chapter one, I stressed the importance of fluid and changeable relationships between the social, the material and the symbolic. Within this chapter, I examine in detail the various components that collectively produce hospitality space. More importantly, I explore the dynamic relationship between these components as they interact to create a totality.

I will begin with a critical examination of hospitality and consider the social elements of its production and consumption. Within the second section, I go on to examine the notion of myths before offering a critical discussion on social organisation. The following section explores the relationships between individual and cultural identities, or more specifically, the processes of identification in social organisation. The subsequent section develops the previous themes through a critical discussion on space and spatial practices. The final section brings together the theoretical debates and examines the issues of ideology, power and the reproduction of knowledge.

Hospitality and its contexts

The motivations and values of contemporary hospitality academics are clearly reflected in their working definitions of hospitality. For example, the Joint Hospitality Industry Congress defined hospitality as: “the provision of food and/or drink and/or accommodation away from home” (Lashley 2000: 3). Similarly, the Higher Education Funding Council defined hospitality as: “the provision of food and/or drink and/or accommodation in a service context” (ibid.). The problem with these definitions of hospitality is in their business orientation, which is limited to a commercial and economic understanding of the term hospitality.

Alternatively, Wood and Brotherton identified a number of the key features that collectively define hospitality. In their view, hospitality:

- is concerned with producing and supplying certain physical product; namely accommodation and/or food and/or drink;
- involves an exchange relationship, which may be primarily economic, social or psychological in nature;
- consists of a combination of tangible and intangible elements, the precise proportion of each varying according to the specifics of different hospitality exchange situation;
- is associated with particular forms of human behaviour and interaction;
- is not inevitably synonymous with hospitable behaviour, which is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the existence of hospitality;
- is an activity entered into on a voluntarily basis by the parties involved;
- may be provided and consumed for a variety of motives;
- can vary in its specific form, function, and motivational basis across time and space, but in essence remains qualitatively the same;
- is an activity designed to produce commensality and mutual enhancement for parties who engage in it;
- involves people in the process of the hospitality exchange; and,
- is an exchange which takes place within an intermediate time frame, and one which reflects the close temporal connection between its production and consumption aspects. (Wood and Brotherton 2000: 141-142)

Brotherton distilled these concepts in defining hospitality as:

A contemporaneous human exchange, which is voluntarily entered into, and designed to enhance the mutual well being of the parties concerned through the provision of accommodation, and/or food, and/or drink. (1999: 168)

This offers a broader understanding of hospitality but also raises a number of important themes that require some clarification. First, assuming hospitality is an experience constructed by the host, this facilitates consumption and/or *interaction between* guests/consumers. Consequently, the production and consumption of hospitality refers to the relationship of whole networks of people. Simultaneously, it is essential to question what is really produced and consumed, and how. Of course, guests may still be consuming physical items such as food or drink; however, production and consumption also refers to intangible things such as culture, social interaction, ambience, moods, gestures and ideas, through verbal and non-verbal communication. This augmented understanding is important so the hospitality experience can be explored simultaneously as a commercial activity and as social and cultural exchange.

The second issue concerns the importance of exchange relations between hosts and guests. As Selwyn stated: “the basic function of hospitality is to establish a relationship or to promote an already established relationship” (2000: 19). Interpersonal exchange relations thus have a temporal consideration and may involve longitudinal commitment from the parties involved. Consequently, the guest must also play a role within these exchange relations. Just as Mauss (1954) observed, gifts are not singular acts of goodwill but are often a part of longitudinal relationships that involve future reciprocity. The host-guest relationships within hospitality are linked to rituals of exchange and social obligations to give, receive and return the gesture. What we are presented with is

a set of roles that people take up during a relationship; at one time they may be the recipients of these 'gifts' of hospitality, while at other times, they may be the providers. I would go even further and argue that the terms 'host' and 'guest' may in fact be misleading. They imply fixed social positions and roles within the exchange relationship. However, when roles are considered in terms of their obligations, this then reconfigures their meanings. More specifically, if the guest also has obligations to create the exchange relationship, then he or she is a necessary component of that relationship. After all, what is hospitality without the recipient? Consequently, if the guest assumes the responsibilities of the host in constructing the very experience, he or she actively participates in constructing the entire ecology of hospitality. The guest constructs the hospitality space simultaneously with the host.

Third, Wood and Brotherton argue that there is a sense of mutual commensality for those who engage in it. However, an important question to ask is who actually engages in it? Multiple social actors are 'engaged' in the spatialisation of hospitality and the term engagement must include those people that are excluded and isolated from participating in hospitality ecologies. Therefore, the discussion must also consider the way the production and consumption of hospitality creates and reinforces social divisions. Hospitality as a commercial and social venture must be understood as activities of consumption and exchange that rely on restriction, differentiation, exclusion and social division to function.

Considering what is actually produced or consumed within hospitality ecologies, the obligations of exchange relationships, and the importance of distinction and differentiation, offers a broader understanding hospitality. Hospitality is not reduced to a set of organisational or managerial problems but seen as a complex social enterprise, one that may nevertheless take place in a commercial context.

Arguably, the meanings and implications of hospitality differ according to the contexts in which it is produced or consumed. Lashley (2000) considered the nature of hospitality in the private, social and commercial realms, outlining the disparate motivations and obligations of hosts and guests in the different contexts. In the following pages, I will draw on Lashley's arguments and discuss how these different contexts of hospitality, and the different values they embody, relate and overlap.

Hospitality in the private domain

Telfer (1996, 2000), Visser (1991) and Heal (1990) have dedicated considerable space to defining the potential roles of hospitality. Consequently, I will only spend a limited amount of time to considering this subject. I have already pointed to the importance of longitudinal commitment and reciprocity within the private domain. I also emphasised that the 'gifts' of hospitality are not simply physical objects that serve to fulfil physiological needs of thirst or hunger. Acts of hospitality are often symbolic gestures, which also cater to social and psychological needs. As Telfer (2000) acknowledged, acts of hospitality can be considered alongside concepts of entertainment and safety. The host ensures that the safety and wellbeing of the guest is assured, and they are provided with adequate amusements. "To entertain a guest is to make yourself responsible for his [*sic*] happiness so long as he is beneath your roof" (Brillat-Savarin 1970: 14 quoted in Telfer 2000: 39). The host's obligation for the guests' well-being implies entertaining them while protecting them from any possible harm.

When considering the bar in the principal case study, which was often described as a 'haven', the provision of shelter for the guest was given added meaning. The bar was considered a space of allowance where certain types of behaviour were permissible and people could engage in behaviours without fear of persecution. The role of the host as

provider, and protector, was given new symbolic weighting in relation to discourses of persecution and intolerance.

This also meant the host had to assume the role of arbitrator whose duty it was to nullify any tensions between guests. The host had to ensure that disagreements did not escalate into open hostility. Hospitality was no longer about relationships between individuals but between social units or networks of people and the cultural values they represented.

Hospitality in the social domain

Beyond individual exchange relationships, hospitality links a range of individuals, all taking up dialogic relationships with cultural discourses. Hospitality encounters can be seen as those displays of affiliation or even distance in which people engage. Within these encounters, cultural norms are produced, defined, reproduced, transformed, resisted or defied. In constructing these ecologies, host and guest can be seen to be positioning themselves (albeit temporarily) on a social map. Involvement in exchange relations reinforces or stabilises future relationships. Naturally, these may be relationships of distance, exclusion or differentiation. Nevertheless, the collective consumption of hospitality in one context is used to define social positions and subsequent power relations in others (Valentine 2002).

Rituals of interaction such as making conversation and buying drinks are essentially private forms of exchange performed in a social setting. The important thing to consider is the weighting these rituals have in specific context, and how they influence future social organisation. Within this thesis, I consider the relevance and significance of these acts within specific social contexts. In doing so, I examine how these ritualised, codified exchanges, are learned and move from existing participants to new ones. Some of these performative repertoires, codes or models are learned or adopted outside the consuming

environment. Others develop through direct engagement with specific social spaces, and those consuming within.

Hospitality in the commercial domain

The roles of the host in the commercial context are slightly different to those in the private and social sense. The hosts' private role, in terms of welcoming, providing and ensuring well-being, must also include the organisational necessities of constructing the hospitality ecologies. The emphasis is placed on the control of the hospitality experience as both context and process.

Arguably, the financial transaction comes to replace the act of reciprocity. Telfer (1996) suggested these acts of hospitality might not be considered hospitality at all because the motivation to perform these roles is financial and therefore insincere. Simultaneously, the obligations to reciprocate are minimised as the transaction becomes a business relationship, above a social or private interaction. However, as Wood (1994) pointed out, the introduction of a financial transaction does not automatically exclude the potential for sincere and emotional exchanges. On the contrary, the private and social elements of hospitality (reciprocity, belongingness, identification, status, position and exclusion) intersect with commercial interests. Nevertheless, management seek to choreograph or orchestrate the hospitality encounter.

Arlie Hochschild's (1983) notion of emotional labour is particularly useful in understanding the host-guest relationship in the service context. Hochschild set out the differences between surface and deep acting in the presentation of self. Surface acting implies a conscious manipulation of outwardly directed expressions of feeling or emotions. Hochschild (1979, 1983) was particularly critical of Goffman, who placed excessive emphasis on surface acting in his examinations of self-presentation.

Conversely, 'deep acting' implies a blurring between the way we are *supposed* to feel and behave, and the way we *actually* do. Hochschild developed the notion of 'emotion work' (1979, 1983) where individuals attempt to direct their feelings (and subsequent expressions of feelings) based on socially or culturally accepted values concerning how they are supposed to feel. Deep acting: "presupposes an aspiration to feel" (1983: 39), implying a kind of socially directed self-delusion.

For Hochschild, emotional labour in the service encounter is a mobilisation of deep acting; the construction and performance of an 'appropriate' self becomes the essential basis of emotional labour. I am arguing that the appropriateness of self is determined by the social order of the hospitality ecology. Emotional labour becomes instrumental, and those 'managing' the hospitality space encourage, manipulate and appropriate these performances of selves. "The locus of acting, the emotional management, moves up to the level of the institution" (1983: 49).

Within the hospitality experience, the body is a key element of both 'emotional work', which reflects appropriate presentations of self in the social sense, and 'emotional labour', which refers to the way feelings and emotions are mobilised as a labour resource. Halford et al (1997) and Tyler and Hancock (2001) have talked in the past about the 'organised body' and the 'organisational body' in conceptualising the relationship between organisational agendas and the 'embodied' character of service provision. Tyler and Hancock's notion of the 'organisational body' refers to the way employees become the: "embodiment of an organisational identity" and: "the material signifier of an organisational ethos" (2001: 25). "What this suggests is an embodied process of organisational anthropomorphism, which simultaneously subjectifies the organisation and objectifies the employee" (2001: 34).

Those at the front-line of service provision are obliged conform to the requirements of the broader organisation, but also the expectations of the guests or consumers, which

leads to specific 'embodied' performances of self. This simultaneously reflects aesthetic expectations and the visual consumption of the sexualised body, but also gendered expectations, linked to what are perceived as feminine emotional qualities such as empathy and servitude. The principal case study examines the way 'hosts' assumed certain social roles within the hospitality experience and how their emotional, sexualised and aesthetic embodied selves were entangled in the experience. Furthermore, it is argued, that in a similar way, the embodied performances of the guest or consumer were an equally important part of the experience.

Within the research contexts, there was already a blurring between the private and social realms. The commercial interests of the management amplified this collapse of different life spheres. On the one hand, management sought to control the behaviour of operational staff in the service encounter. More importantly, the management also drew on the collective sentiment of the guests and their emotional involvement with the culture of hospitality space. This too was then purposefully mobilised in the construction of commercial hospitality ecologies. Consequently, the provision of emotional labour and appropriate 'embodied' performances of self were no longer limited to the traditional hosts (the management or front line staff); they became the responsibility of the guest.

In outlining the character and nature of hospitality, the preceding discussion set out to blur the division between the private, social and the commercial hospitality contexts. However, because my intention is to develop a social and cultural approach to commercial hospitality, there is a need to understand the social basis for people's consumption of, and participation in, commercial hospitality. Consequently, the next step is to examine the basis for collectivity and mutual affiliation among the consumers and guests. I have sought to do this through the notion of myths.

Myths

In chapter one, I argued that in order to examine the nature of social relations, it was necessary to consider two particular areas. First, the collective sentiments (the mutual interests) that allow people to feel a sense of commonality with others; and second, the shared actions and objects (essentially a system of signs) that allow people to articulate a sense of commonality. Within this section, I examine how notions of collective sentiment are constructed or reconstructed within consumption practices. In doing so, my intention is to demonstrate how myths come to be spatialised, and the necessary conditions required for their continued existence.

There are numerous and often conflicting definitions of myths and I do not intend to review all of them. Ruthven (1976) for example, has already dedicated a volume to this project. Instead, I will concentrate on two approaches to myths and mythology, both of which are useful within my argument.

Conceptualising myths usually draws on either the socio-linguistic/socio-political approaches (Barthes 1993, Fiske 1990), or folkloric and ethnological definitions (Jary and Jary 1995). I have drawn on both these approaches but have not stayed faithful to either.

Barthes understood myths as a 'type of speech' (1993: 109). More specifically, a process of signification where the relationship between signifier and signified is elevated beyond the construction of language objects (words-as-signs). This is a secondary level of signification, where language and 'speech' come to signify complex abstract concepts. Barthes used the term speech in its broader sense, which utilises images, written genres, oral language, and, inevitably, embodied performances to convey myths, which he sees essentially as *messages*.

For us, the important aspect of Barthes' work is not the Saussurian legacy (the technical process of signification). What is important to consider is the way these myths appear, change, and function in specific cultural milieus. Barthes viewed myths as politically instrumental messages where specific social groups (classes) disguise their dominating strategies by creating an illusory social reality (a false consciousness). As a result, the social positions and power relationships between dominant and dominated are naturalised.

While Barthes' approach is useful, it is not necessarily appropriate to view myths as political instruments of domination. I agree with Barthes that myths do not necessarily hide reality, but distort it. To some extent, this is a sort of artifice. Furthermore, it is also important to recognise that myths can be mobilised to serve some political goal. However, it seems myopic to assume that myths are always mobilised so purposively, or that their creators are that calculated in terms of motivation. Myths often extend from serendipitous encounters and misperceptions of these events; these misperceptions are mobilised and reappear in narrative or discursive form.

The second approach to understanding myths is essentially ethnological. Anthropologists have given considerable attention to the nature, meaning and the potential function of myths, especially in 'archaic' societies. Although what constitutes myth is debatable, myths are generally considered sacred texts or narratives by which certain cultures understand their cosmology or existence. Levi-Strauss (1955, 1966, 1967, 1983) argued that myths were a prelude to scientific thought within 'pre-literate' societies. For Levi-Strauss myths were not meant to explain the natural or social world. Instead, myths were a way to understand abstract relations and act as an interpretative framework through which inherent contradictions in nature and culture could be mediated and settled.

Here too there is the potential for political instrumentality. Myths come to organise social structure and establish hierarchies, which are then naturalised and legitimised. Specific groups use myths to construct and maintain certain moral codes and aesthetic values, which are prescribed through such sacred narratives and their associated rituals. For Malinowski (1948) and Durkheim (1968), myths form the fundamental basis for religious and political organisation, social distinction and cultural identification. Because of their sacred status, myths function as an undisputable normative schema that directly informs both social structure and action. As such, myths are socially and politically instrumental as they are employed to justify or assert territorial and property rights and social or political status.

Malinowski (1948, 1962) and Raglan (1955) argued that myths must be considered in relation to their ritualistic embodiment. In drawing a clear link between myth and ritual, it is possible to understand how myths inform mundane social processes. Malinowski was not necessarily interested in the narrative content of the myth but was instead concerned with the social context in which they were purposefully deployed.

Malinowski (1948: 79-89) distinguished between folk-tales or fairy tales, historical accounts, hearsay tales and legends, and myths. Folk-tales are stories of magic and magical creatures, while historical accounts, hearsay tales and legends concern adventures and expeditions, reflecting a mixture of pseudo-historical and fantastic accounts. The first types of stories are: "told for amusement" (1948: 84), while the second: "make a serious statement and satisfy social ambition" (ibid.). Myths on the other hand are sacred tales employed when a: "social or moral rule demands justification" (1948: 85).

The usefulness of Malinowski's contextualised approach to folklore and mythology is the way representational practices are understood in relation to relationships of power and particular forms of social organisation and action. However, because my fieldwork

reflects fundamentally different modes of social organisation, this anthropological approach presents three crucial difficulties. First, it is problematic to assume that myths are necessarily sacred; second, it is equally difficult to assume that there is a consistent relationship between myths and social rituals; and third, it is misleading to argue that myths are the exclusive property of specific groups.

The contemporary, urban, western European contexts of the research means Malinowski's categories of socially constructed narrative are irrelevant. I am not differentiating between different types of narratives (or their embodiment in ritual), only the extent to which myths, as understandings, become circulated. The statuses of particular understandings, and their manifestation as narrative or embodied action, change according to the value they are assigned in their reproduction. Consequently, I do not consider myths to be sacred, only more or less recognised and acknowledged.

Myths exist in the everyday world of the profane, often devoid of ritual; those who invent or tell them do not necessarily see myths as anything except common understandings. These are understandings reflected in practices, objects as well as stories and anecdotes, although they may not take explicit forms as Malinowski assumed. This is not to say myths cannot be elevated in status to reflect some profound reality. Nor does this deny that people use myth-like narratives to arrange and understand certain social rituals or social values. Quite the opposite, myths of all sorts come to influence our individual and cultural positions and actions.

People associate themselves with certain myths, they gather around existing myths, which signify points of commonality; they also distance themselves from certain myths, and the reality that they appear to represent. Myths thus come to simultaneously *reflect*, and at the same time *create*, a social reality for individuals. Our use of myths and our positions towards certain myths, positions us.

Earlier, I stated that myths manifest themselves in ‘cultural milieus’, a term which I deliberately used instead of cultural groups. Cultural milieus are different from cultural groups, which imply stable social units. Milieus are ‘gatherings’; social spaces where individuals gather to form more or less stable social units. Myths come to be *associated* with certain social milieus, although these myths may not be the construct of those intimately involved; they may be the constructs of those ‘observing’ from a distance.

I have defined myths as *sets of understandings that draw upon, and reflect, people’s cultural and natural environment, which then take ‘shape’ in linguistic and social utterances: narratives, embodied actions, images and objects*. These understandings relate to a broader universe that lies outside of individual practices. In this sense, myths seemingly arise outside of immediate social experience. However, collective understandings are simultaneous constructions *and* appropriations, so myths must be seen as being produced within social experience. Myths are socially exchanged messages that form through translation, the continual process of ‘things and ideas taking form’ (Barthes 1993). They are constantly transformed, elevated and disseminated as individuals appropriate myths, and their meanings are intensified.

For example, earlier I pointed to the critical role of the embodied agent within commercial hospitality contexts. The physical bodies and the bodily performances of the service staff become the sites for the process of myth making; understandings or myths surrounding the organisation of the hospitality relationship take shape within the embodied performance of the service staff. The body as both physical and semiotic entity acts as the carrier of such understandings; it becomes the points of agency where these knowledges are transferred and transformed within new service encounters.

Certain individuals, cultures, places, events, and even types of social or political acts have myths associated with them. However, these myths are not the property of any specific individual or group. In terms of ownership, myths are as much individual as

they are cultural; they are dialogic phenomena in the way they are simultaneously shared and individual. Myths are often polyvocal, where any common understanding, however insignificant or personal it may seem, is full of past voices and utterances. Their existence, their appropriation and retelling, reflect a range of social values and political motivations. People seemingly distant from, or even outside of, certain cultural groups may still engage with or disseminate specific myths. Therefore, these 'outsiders' perpetuate myths, although they may not see themselves as having anything to do with the group. They may actually do it as a way to disassociate themselves from certain social groups and cultural discourses.

It is important to emphasise the difference between myths and discourses, although the two are closely related. Discourses are interpretative frameworks; networks of understandings operating through relationships of power that determine what can be known. Myth making is the process where discourses are mobilised in expression and take shape as understanding. As Barthes stated, the characteristic of myths are that they: "transform meaning into form" (1993: 131). This transformation or 'mythification' operates through a process of inflexion; the actors or speakers (in the broad sense of the word) interpret and reshape the meanings of specific embodied actions, events or objects. These interpretations depend partly on the social position of the actor/speaker, but also on the relationship between them and the interpreter or listener (again in the broad sense of the word). Myths serve to position those who tell them, perform or enact them; those who listen to them; and those who then make use of them. Again, the issues that concern us are what people say or do, who they say or do it to, how these are performed, and when.

Within this thesis, I am trying to avoid reifying myths and treating them as social facts existing as objective entities. Instead, I am arguing that myths should be understood in terms of the processes of their formation and articulation. Furthermore, a critical

analysis of these processes must consider the social and political contexts in both the immediate situational and historical sense. Within the following section, I introduce Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of genres as a conceptual scheme that helps to understand the processes of myth formation and transformation.

Myths as speech genres

Common understandings (myths) emerge from everyday interaction; they become crystallised through repetition and as they are appropriated by increasing numbers of social agents; they are diffused at a greater rate, and with more impact. It seems reasonable to argue that the potential meanings of myths are reified through this process of appropriation. The increased circulation means they become more accepted and their status is elevated. Naturally, there is the possibility for transformation, and consequently, myths may weaken or disappear altogether.

Mikhail Bakhtin's (1986) notion of speech genres is a useful way to understand this process. As Bakhtin argued: "each separate utterance is individual, of course, but each sphere in which language is used develops its own *relatively stable types* of these utterances. These we may call *speech genres*" (1986: 60). Just as with the metaphor of dialogue, the notion of 'genres' refers to more than just speech or language; it operates at a social and cultural level. Cultural genres are relatively stable types of 'social utterances' that include embodied actions, objects, images, written texts as well as language and specific speech acts in the process of signification.

Take gay cultures for example, they appear in various manifestations and have numerous associated cultural genres. Some, of course, are more frequently recurring. These genres, and their associated signs and myths operate metonymically. Therefore, one aspect of culture (a specific type of clothing, a way of dressing, acting, speaking, or

even types of body shapes as physical ideals), come to represent a greater whole, that of gay culture or a cultural subgroup.

Bakhtin differentiated between simple (primary) and complex (secondary) genres. *Primary genres*, operate at the everyday level, mostly through oral language and small, seemingly insignificant actions.

Through repetition, adoption and transformation these primary genres are then incorporated into *secondary genres*. These utilise multiple mediums and integrate *sets* of discourses, objects, texts and images to create complex types of utterances such as 'lifestyles'. Take something like the physical ideal of gay youth for example, characterised by chiselled features, slim body, elaborate hairstyles, tight fitting and expensive designer clothes. These are styles that emerged as specific individuals appropriated 'stylistic items' (objects-as-signs), and juxtaposed them to create self-images (primary genres). Through contact with other gay consumers, specific gay-oriented media, and marketing agents, these images are popularised as lifestyle-images (secondary genres).

The images of smiling young boys with glittering white teeth that decorate the covers of magazines such as *Boyz* every week serve to reinforce these discourses. The relationship between the forces of production, the media and culture is dialogic. As Gladwell (2000) illustrated, corporations constantly search for new styles, which are then popularised and fed back to a broader consuming public. These fashion trends emerge as individuals create unique new styles for themselves. Commercial organisations make these styles more palatable, reproducible, affordable and accessible, thus more appropriate for mass production and consumption.

In the same way, the narcissistic character of contemporary society has led to the culture of constant surveillance and retransmission. Ways of speaking, phrases, expressions, actions and bodily dispositions are popularised by the media and marketing

agents. As the rate of diffusion increases, they gradually become cultural signifiers for people aspiring to position themselves socially.

This is not to say the media and marketing agents do all the work; the meaning and value of types of dress, speech and action spreads through primary genres, as well as secondary genres. Meanings are refined through everyday interaction with one's localised social environment. However, the media accelerate this process of signification.

The myths associated with a culture or subculture (which are themselves realised in the form of genres) become diffused as part of everyday interaction. Simultaneously, the networks of mediating forces appropriate primary genres to construct complex messages that correspond to secondary genres. Some of these myths are formed through contact with other marketing and media agents who repeat and strengthen these myths. These heavily mediated and frequently repeated myths then feed back into everyday social realms. For example, when people encounter a particular bar and its inhabitants, they may already be equipped with mythological knowledge about 'that sort of place' and 'those sorts of people'. Consequently, the knowledge of secondary genres critically influences the perceptions and actions of observers and would-be participants.

This leads on to an important point concerning the relationship between culture, myth and space. Lifestyles often become spatialised, with hospitality venues being typical sites. Producers, consumers and commentators incorporate these locations into genres and they become expressions of social identity. Hospitality spaces begin to develop what Rob Shields (1991) called 'place-myths': *spatialised understandings* where cultural myths become geographically located. Of course the culture of the bar, its place-myth, is not a stable entity. They are merely the most frequently reasserted 'place-images' and understandings that come to circulate about the spatial location (ibid.).

Following Fiske (1990) and Rojek (1997), I am arguing that Shields' place-images operate indexically. The semiotics of space act as reference points in an index of potential meanings. Combinations of objects and human behaviours (as signs) come to reflect a social reality to the 'reader'. Of course, the reader does not simply receive visual cues passively which he or she then catalogues. A participant of culture, even if participating by observing, interprets the possible meanings of actions and objects. This process of interpretation is simultaneously an act of projection where social actors assign value to actions and objects (including places). He or she may be equipped with knowledge of genres (those complex understandings that define a lifestyle category or a subcultural group) which help him, or her, to construct an intelligible cosmology. These understandings are mobilised when individuals encounter spaces and places, and brought into the act of interpretation and understanding.

Place-images do not form in isolation but are the result of past encounters and experiences. Consequently, the creation of place-images draws on countless other circulated myths. In this sense, place-images, as well as place-myths work through the principle of polyvocality. Images and myths associated one specific spatial location, are constructed as a variety of 'items' are juxtaposed. Whatever form these items take, whether physical objects or actions, they are culturally meaningful signals (as signs). Each of these items brings with it a set of associated meanings (the past voices) that intersect to form an explicit expression of culture (utterance). However, for us, understanding the forms that culture takes, i.e., specific cultural objects or behaviours, is only the beginning. The aim is to interpret the knowledge that is bound up in cultural forms and to understand how this knowledge is mobilised (Crang 1996). In other words, it is not just the specific points on a social map that are important, but the routes that connect the points.

The symbolic values of hospitality ecologies (as social spaces) reflect this polyvocality and indexicality. People's behaviours or their narrative interpretations of the bar and its clientele reinforce, or weaken its symbolic value situationally. The myths about people and place exist dialogically; people project emotional value onto people and places; and, the same time, the perceived or commonly accepted myths surrounding people and places come to influence people's perceptions and subsequent actions.

Collective understandings or myths reflect social positions that inform a sense of identification with individuals and social groupings. These understandings act as the *basis of association*, what I referred to in chapter one as the themes that bring people together. The next step is to consider the potential form that this association takes. More specifically, there is a need to introduce a conceptual scheme that helps to understand how people organise themselves through common understandings. In order to do this, the following section considers two complementary approaches to social organisation that draw on notions of common understandings.

Social organisation

The commercial production and consumption of hospitality is characterised by discontinuous participation and shifting association. Consequently, in order to examine the possibility for social association and identification, there is a need to outline a conceptual framework that accommodates fragmentary social organisation. With this in mind, I will briefly review Michel Maffesoli's notion of 'neo-tribalism' (1996) and Victor Turner's work on 'communitas' (1969, 1974, 1982).

Both Maffesoli and Turner offer a dynamic, transactional framework for understanding social organisation. What is important to note is the importance that Maffesoli and Turner place on emotions, feelings and ambiances. These may be emotionally potent

but academically problematic modes of association. As such, they form one part of a wider discussion on networks of relationships that considers broader political, economic and material forces.

Collectivity as neo-tribalism

The rational era is built on the principle of individuation and of separation, whereas the empathetic period is marked by the lack of differentiation, the 'loss' in a collective subject: in other words, what I shall be calling neo-tribalism. [...] We are witnessing the tendency for a rational 'social' to be replaced by an empathetic 'sociality', which is expressed by a succession of ambiances, feelings and emotions. (Maffesoli 1996: 11)

Maffesoli used the concept of 'stimmung' (atmosphere) to describe the relations between individuals in micro-cultures/subcultures. Similar to Weber's 'emotional communities' (gemeinde), 'neo-tribes' are ephemeral – characterised by a 'changeable composition', 'ill-defined nature', a vernacular, 'local flavour', and a 'lack of proper organisation' (Maffesoli 1996: 12).¹ These micro-cultures develop through 'shared aesthetics' as individuals come together through some 'force of attraction' where people search for those who: "*think and feel as [they] do*" (1996: 13). Maffesoli's neo-tribes are naturally inclusive modes of social organisation drawing on commonality.

Here Maffesoli introduced the term 'proxemics', which is concerned with the nature of people's relationships, social interactions and the social distance between them. It is the sense of closeness among people exposed to each other while sharing the same physical or symbolic territory (1996: 16). Conceptual or ideological common grounds draw people together; individual interests in activities or experiences become shared interests.

These are not necessarily communal, although they are no longer experienced individually. The commercial hospitality venue becomes one such potential common territory, the platforms where people come to engage with one another. At once, it is the site for experience that leads to communal sentiment, and, the site where existing commonality is materialised in time and space.

These mysterious forces of attraction are infused with what Maffesoli referred to as the 'ethical experience' of collectivity. The term ethical does not necessarily refer to a moral standpoint, but an empathetic understanding intertwined with the crystallisation of shared feelings and emotions. "The collective sensibility which issues from the aesthetic form results in an ethical connection" (1996: 18). The shared aesthetic (common sentiment) is realised through the ethic (the collective bond based on the shared aesthetic). The ethical experience materialises in the rituals and forms of interaction that may be understood as customs. The fundamental task is to identify these customs, and question how they come to be codified and understood by those inside and outside of the 'group'. The customs will themselves be powerful signifiers of the discourse of the group, its shared aesthetic, and the nature of its ethical bond.

Maffesoli offers a useful conceptual basis to build on although there are several difficulties in his theory. Most significantly, because his work is not drawn from, or related to, contextualised empirical evidence, he remains speculative and relatively vague about how these concepts operate in specific contexts. The decontextualised nature of Maffesoli's argument compromises the applicability of shared aesthetics and the ethical experience.

The later chapters demonstrate how something similar to a shared aesthetic and an ethical experience develop in a concrete locality. Using the mythological/ecological approach, I discuss how shared interests are constructed and mediated in social interaction. Furthermore, whereas Maffesoli's neo-tribes are ephemeral 'happenings',

by examining the broader historical basis of social organisation the aim is to consider the temporal element. This thesis attempts to question how social organisations form and change, and how social agents negotiate their survival. The mythological analysis also attempts to offer a more specific understanding of how shared aesthetics or interests are mediated by extended networks of communicative agents. These include capital-intensive organisations employing a range of dissemination technologies alongside more intimate and localised human networks.

The critique concerning Maffesoli's theoretical abstraction also applies to his notion of proxemics. Just as with the notions of shared aesthetics and the ethical experience, proxemics acts as a 'sensitising concept' (Blumer 1931) pointing to new directions in critical thought without offering a concrete framework. In order to develop a pragmatic approach to proximity relations, it is useful to look to behavioural science and social psychology. Therefore, I will set out a more detailed and empirically grounded version of *social proximity* as it operates within the commercial hospitality context. This is something I will then return to in chapter 5.

Proximity

In simple terms, proximity reflects how we feel we relate to other people around us. Proximity is a sense of position, closeness to, or distance from, others, which draws on principles of similarity and difference. A useful starting point is Rogers and Bhowmik's (1971) notions of 'homophily' and 'heterophily'. Homophily and heterophily are concerned with whether two people consider each other similar or different in terms of specific attributes. These are attributes such as beliefs, educational levels or social status. Rogers and Bhowmik proposed a subjective and an objective aspect to this sense of perceived similarity/difference. The subjective measure deals with the way a person

perceives another to be similar or different, while the objective measure accounts for the *actual* similarity or difference in terms of specific attributes.

Similarly, Bogardus (1925) sought to understand which types of people subjects felt close to or distanced from. Participants would indicate whether they would like to have certain types of people as friends, lovers, co-workers or elect to have them thrown out of the country. Since then, a number of researchers, mainly behaviourists and psychologists, have addressed issues of interpersonal attraction and relationship dynamics. Most have focused primarily on cognitive or psychological attributes (Berscheid and Walster 1978, Jones and Daugherty 1959, Lott and Lott 1965, Runkel 1956), although some have considered issues of status and geographical distribution (Schutte and Light 1978, Barnlund and Harland 1963). These studies employed statistical psychometric or 'sociometric' (Moreno 1953) methods, which focus on a limited set of variables.

Social psychologists such as Forgas (1978, 1985) have devised similar studies based on small groups. These experiments used multidimensional scaling to determine the nature of 'affiliative' relationships based on a sense of similarity or difference in terms of personality characteristics. However, studies such as that of Forgas' used small stable groups of people who knew each other intimately. The problem with such a method is that encounters are often ephemeral and numerous (especially when thinking about a social context such as a bar or nightclub). Furthermore, individuals may not be aware of specific environmental, situational, biographical, and interpersonal factors that influence an encounter. Not to mention the broader forces that positions the individual in society. Even beyond such grand philosophical considerations, the practicalities of completing such self-administered questionnaire after every encounter would make for a very dull evening (see Monge and Kirste (1980) for example).

I am not suggesting a symmetrical link between a sense of similarity or difference and feelings of closeness or distance in terms of proximity. Not everyone wants to be around people that are just like him or her (similar). Moreover, it is important not to view similarity or difference simplistically. Friends or acquaintances can have different tastes and values but associate with each other because they have some common interests. Two people may disagree about which bar they like to drink in although they both like drinking in bars. Therefore, proximity is not necessarily dependent on simple principles of sameness or difference but on collective and shared interests based on commonalities. Similarity or difference may be the basis for people's sense of commonality. Nevertheless, our feeling of closeness and distance is dependent on whether we like what we have in common.

Naturally, what we perceive as commonalities, and our liking or disliking, is not a purely individual decision. There is a dialogical link between individuals, and the conditioning factors located outside of them, in culture. However, the point is that similarity in some respects (shared moral or aesthetic values for example) allows people to feel closer in some situations. At the same time, perceived difference in other situations invoke feelings of distance. The issue thus becomes the tensions between situations (social utterances in specific contexts) and long-term relationships. While social distance arising from difference in specific situations is acceptable, say if two people disagree about a certain topic or if they like each other emotionally, but not sexually. However, in the long term, there has to be a consistent set of factors that reinforce commonality or the relationship becomes unsustainable. To state the obvious: the nature of your commonalities determines the nature, longevity and intensity of the relationship.

Communitas

Victor Turner (1969, 1982) offers an alternative approach to understanding collective affiliation and group dynamics. Maffesoli's neo-tribes are viewed as ephemeral and naturally occurring entities. Alternatively, Turner's understanding of social organisation considered the temporal and the structural frameworks that underpin social organisation. Turner sought to understand social organisation in terms of *communitas*, which vary in terms of their composition and structural nature. Turner distinguished between *spontaneous* or *existential*, *normative* and *ideological* communitas, each of which is briefly outlined below.

Spontaneous communitas and liminality

Spontaneous or existential communitas can be thought of as a 'happening', a flash point where individuals find a common social space (Turner 1969: 132). More specifically, individuals find commonality in a point in socialised space. Similar to Maffesoli's neo-tribes, Turner's communitas materialise through close proximity relations, a mode of sociality reliant on direct interaction. Consequently, it is inherently 'local in flavour' – vernacular in form and substance. It is interesting to note that both Turner and Maffesoli's arguments are infused with a romanticised version of these moments in space and time. To quote Turner:

Spontaneous communitas is a "direct, immediate and total confrontation of human identities," a deep rather than intense style of personal interaction. "It has something 'magical' about it. Subjectively there is in it a feeling of endless power." Is there any of us who has not known this moment when

compatible people-friends, congeners-obtain a flash of lucid mutual understanding on the existential level, when they feel that all problems, not just their problems, could be resolved whether emotional or cognitive, if only the group is felt (in the first person) as “essentially us” could sustain its intersubjective illumination. This illumination may succumb to the dry light of next day’s disjunction, the application of singular and personal reason to the “glory” of communal understanding. But when the mood, style or “fit” of spontaneous *communitas* is upon us, we place high value on personal honesty, openness, and a lack of pretensions or pretentiousness. We feel that it is important to relate directly another person as he presents himself in the here-and-now, to understand him in a sympathetic (not an empathetic – which implies some withholding, some non-giving of the self) way, free from the culturally defined encumbrances of his role, status, reputation, class, caste, sex or other structural niche. Individuals who interact with one another in the mode of spontaneous *communitas* become totally absorbed into a single synchronized fluid event. (1982: 47-8)

Turner’s impassioned tone is engaging, although it poses a number of methodological problems. Assuming for the moment that people can escape their socialisation and prejudices, how do we record these ephemeral sensations? Turner placed these moments outside of ordinary structure. In trying to capture these moments, ethnography decontextualises them; the emotional is replaced by the representational, which strips it of its original elusive vitality. How do existential *communitas* exist and how do we know them to exist? To what extent are existential *communitas* psychological constructs? Do ethnographic accounts reify the phenomena, exaggerating and distorting it to a point where it becomes a caricature of some social event? These questions of

representational trustworthiness invade all notions of existential *communitas*. This is not to deny their existence, but it undermines our ability to know them as concrete states of being. At best, ethnography presents accounts of *like-forms*, the residual traces of *communitas* in representational form (Clifford and Marcus 1986).

Similarly, for Maffesoli, these moments of cohesion are characterised by a vitality and energy (*puissance*), created through interaction and mutuality.² This effervescence exists among individuals-as-participants for whom these points of interaction are characterised by some *affectual intersubjectivity*. These are emotional bonds shared by some 'other' who in turn reciprocates. As Turner argued, this affectual intersubjectivity is the key to understanding issues of identity. Individualism becomes an inadequate concept to be replaced with notions of cultural identity and cultural self. Once separate entities, culture and identity are mutual elements in the same process (Jenkins 1996).

Maffesoli's position regarding this affectualism and mutuality is similar to Turner's; these social groupings represent more than the mere gatherings of people; they are transformative processes within social experience. As Turner argues:

[Communitas] exist more in contrast than in active opposition to social structure, as an alternative and more "liberated" way of being socially human, a way both of being detached from social structure – and hence potentially *evaluating* its performance – and also of a "distanced" or "marginal" person's being more attached to *other* disengaged persons – and hence, sometimes of evaluating a social structure's historical performance in common with them. Here we may have a loving union of the structurally damned pronouncing judgement on normative structure and providing alternative models for structure. [...] *Communitas* tend to be inclusive – some might call it "generous" – social structure tends to be exclusive, even snobbish, relishing

the distinction between we/they and in-group/out-group, higher/lower, better/worse. (1982: 50-5)

Though engaging in its tone, Turner's concept of existential *communitas* does not account for issues of difference and conflict that are inherent in any social contact. Spontaneous *communitas* may be social plains of interaction in which difference is negotiated. However, it is difficult to assume these moments of cohesion are not infused with the tensions of the 'outside world'.

Turner views such *communitas* as 'meta-cultures' that occupy a position on the normative margins of dominant cultures, existing in a 'liminal state'. The concept of the 'liminal' was developed by Turner from the earlier anthropological work of Arnold van Gennep (1960). Liminality is the stage in rites of passage ceremonies where the participant has moved from one status and has yet to move to the next status. Liminality is a transitional phase; periods of 'anti-structure' located between one structural status and another. Sutton-Smith (1972) has taken the concept of anti-structure further in relation to contemporary society:

Normative structure represents the working equilibrium, the 'anti structure' represents a latent system of potential alternatives from which novelty will arise when contingencies in the normative system require it. We might more correctly call this second system the *proto structural* system because it is the precursor of innovative normative forms. It is the source of new culture. (1972: 18-19)³

During these periods of anti-structure new paradigms can arise, which feed back into existing social and cultural arenas. Liminality represents a potentially creative situation,

which has the role of developing new symbols and cultural norms by which cultural evolution is achieved. “[The liminal] contains the germ of future social developments, of societal change, in a way that the central tendencies of social systems can never quite succeed in being, the spheres of law and custom, and the modes of social control ancillary to these, prevail” (Turner 1982: 45).

Turner advanced this line of argument by introducing the concept of the ‘liminoid’, which are similarly anti-structural phenomena that exist through leisure genres.⁴ Liminal activities are characteristic of ‘traditional’ tribal societies and have specific functions within formal rituals, while liminoid phenomena are essentially a feature of (late or post) modern societies. They represent the possibility for experimentation with alternative ways of giving meaning to the world. As Bhabha (1996) argued, participants open up spaces of enunciation through which new, negotiated constructions of culture are made possible. This liminality is an essential part of the development and the constant evolution of society.

A more radical understanding of contemporary culture places liminality at the centre of interpretation. For Bhabha, culture in (late) modernity is in a perpetual state of flux, a constant liminality where change, negotiation and reconstruction are the norm. Liminality becomes a defining characteristic of human development and no stable cultural entity is expected to emerge.

Normative communitas

Turner acknowledged that these moments of ‘blissful togetherness’ outside of structure cannot be sustained continuously. Eventually the ‘puissance’ of the group reaches a certain point of inertia. This means a protective social structure develops where: “free relationships between individuals become converted into norm-governed relationships

between social personae” (Turner 1969: 132). The carnivalesque essence of spontaneous communitas cannot be maintained for long before norms, rules and the elements of social structures begin to crystallise.⁵ At the point when participants of spontaneous communitas seek to maintain its existence, they must rely on legislation and normalisation. In constructing a consistent social order, it is essential to exercise control and potentially exclude. It is this temporal element and the problem of boundaries that Maffesoli tends to ignore.

For Maffesoli, the essence of tribalism is its ephemeral nature and the possibility that individuals move constantly from one tribe to another. However, it is not always possible to move from one group to another and from one culture into another (Malbon 1999). As Malbon emphasised, there may be ‘apprenticeship’ periods where the norms of a culture are learned as new participants are acculturated. Furthermore, movement often requires the access to, and mobilisation of, relevant capital resources (economic, social, educational, (sub)cultural, aesthetic). The issue of capital is a key theme within hospitality ecologies in the way it influences participations and it is a subject I will return to later.

Turner does not deny the possibility of movement between groups. However, where the temporal and structural elements are acknowledged in his essay, this opens up the debate regarding the existence of boundaries. As the group or communitas moves towards a formalised state, it seeks to impose inside-outside dichotomies. Individuals, as potential members of normative communitas, attempt to set objectives and aims that reaffirm the coherence of the social unit. As a result, communitas are no longer ephemeral ‘happenings’ but entities that exist on a temporal scale. Participants are made conscious of their potential roles and functions within these communitas.

However, even here, we are still not dealing with a coherent entity but a process. ‘Groups’ or ‘cliques’ are all tentative forms of classification employed by those

supposedly inside and outside these units. Groups are often defined in terms of longer, stable sets of relationships (Johnson and Johnson 1987, Lofland 1976). These relationships work on principles of interdependency, shared goals and an acknowledgement by the members that they are a group. Therefore, it is important to distinguish between co-present individuals and groups.

Group implies a more consistent level of interaction, and a deeper sense of engagement. Perceiving a collection of people as a group is essentially a projection on the part of the onlooker. Often, what are perceived to be groups, are in fact just people who happen to be in close spatial proximity to each other, and who are engaged in some sort of interaction. As an alternative, I have used the term 'social unit' to refer to groupings of people. This consciously blurs the semantic (and empirical) divide between individuals who are simply co-present, and groups, which consist of more intensely interconnected social actors.

The extent to which co-present individuals are *perceived* to be a group or clique depends greatly on two factors: first, the sense of proximity between those supposedly inside and outside; and second, the sense of boundary attached to the social unit. The stronger the perceived sense of similarity and consistency between a collection of people, the more likely it is that they will be treated as a group. Furthermore, the greater the sense of perceived difference and distance of the individuals outside, determines the extent that this social unit is seen as a closed entity.

The extent to which social units *function* as a group is dependent on the feelings of proximity felt by the individuals within it. This in turn draws on the sense of shared interest that shapes the nature of their collective actions. The sense of coherence determines the extent to which they can set mutual goals and function closely to achieve them.

It is important to recognise that the artificial divide between group and co-present individuals is ambiguous; people find certain mutual interests, which draw them together. At the same time, there are varying levels of commitment and involvement within collective units to reach short-term objectives and long-term aims. The term social unit is a more fluid and adaptable term, which has the possibility to incorporate greater or smaller emotional commitment towards others in particular situations. This implies that in particular situations social units are more or less *like* groups.

Ideological communitas

Turner also proposed the existence of ideological communitas, which he understood to be: “utopian models of societies based on existential communitas” (1969: 132). More specifically:

Ideological communitas is at once an attempt to describe the external and visible effects – the outward form, it might be said – of an inward experience of existential communitas, and to spell out the optimal social conditions under which such experiences might be expected to flourish and multiply. (1969: 132)

However, such forms of social organisation are already reliant on norms and rules. The crystallisation of structures works to preserve the unit and attempts to make the utopian ideal a reality. The problem arises when one acknowledges that utopia – meaning ‘no-place’ – is effectively an unachievable, ideal state of being for a community.

Richard Dyer (1999) has differentiated between *models of utopian worlds* in science fiction literature, and *feelings of utopianism* associated with the hedonistic consumption

of modern leisure. This point was taken up by Malbon (1999) in his study of club culture. Participants are engaged in a playful activity as they *experience* utopian ideals through the consumption of leisure. However, this is not the experience of some ideal otherworld. Instead, people engage in a temporary state of utopian experience – experimenting with different spaces and cultures as part of ludic consumption. Just as the ‘post-tourist’ of Feifer (1985) and Urry (2002), the consumers of this utopianism may be fully aware of the ephemeral, shallow and fragile nature of the connectedness; this kind of playfulness becomes an essential part of the experience.

Maffesoli and Turner help to understand the fragmented and dynamic nature of social organisation within hospitality ecologies. More importantly, the concepts of neo-tribalism and *communitas* raise important issues concerning association, belonging, incorporation and exclusion. These are essentially issues of identity and identification with certain social units and their associated understandings or myths. Consequently, the next step is to consider the concept of identity and examine the way identities are implicated in the processes of social organisation.

Identity and identification

The epistemology of the dialogic extends to the notions of self and identity. From the very beginning, it is necessary to problematise the notion of identity as a stable reference. Identities do not exist as fixed entities and the unique property of individuals. Articulations of selves change according to the social and political matrices in which we are located; who we think we are, and who others presume us to be, constantly shifts. Mead for example argued that the subjective ‘I’ (who I see myself to be) and the objective social ‘me’ (who others perceive me to be) are separate but interdependent elements of selfhood. The self is at once experienced as both subject and object.

Perceiving the self-as-object, allows the person to appraise his or her identity reflexively. For Mead, neither the 'I' nor 'me' are given but learned. Therefore, identity formation is an ongoing project. Identity is negotiated reflexively according to specific social configurations. For Mead: "it is impossible to conceive of a self arising outside of social experience" (1956: 217).⁶ "There is usually an organization of the whole self with reference to the community to which we belong, and the situation in which we find ourselves" (1956: 219-220). Similarly to Bakhtin and Vološinov, Mead used the characteristics of dialogue to understand identity. Just as speech acts operate with a listener in mind; 'social utterances' (concerning identification) anticipate the knowledge base of the audience in recognising both the form of the signal and implications of the potential sign.

Mead treated these 'elementary selves' as isolated and separate entities which are then reorganised into a unified whole. "The "I" is the response of the organism to the attitudes of the others; the "me" is the organized set of attitudes of others which one himself [*sic*] assumes. The attitudes of the others constitute the organised "me," and then one reacts toward that as an "I"" (1956: 243). The self, imagined as entity and process, assumes a simultaneous presence and a necessary absence.

The two are separated in the process but they belong together in the sense of being parts of a whole. They are separated and yet they belong together. The separation of the "I" and the "me" is not fictitious. They are not identical [...], the "I" is something that is never entirely calculable. The "me" does call for a certain sort of an "I" in so far as we meet the obligations that are given in conduct itself, but the "I" is always something different from what the situation itself calls for. So there is always that distinction, if you like,

between the “I” and the “me.” The “I” both calls out the “me” and responds to it. (1956: 246)

Mead’s notion of self is inherently linked to the social, although it is assumed to be a cognitive process. However, this presents a number of potential problems. First, this separates the self from the body, which is treated as an empty vessel that the self inhabits. Simultaneously, in emphasising the rational cognitive, he denies the potential role of emotion in the construction and articulation of self. Finally, although the connection between identity and the social world is recognised, this ignores the non-social (i.e., the physical and the economic). It therefore offers a useful starting point in understanding the ongoing relationship between social organisation and socially organised identities. What is needed is to take identity out of the cognitive realm and move it into a broader socio-political frame of analysis. This is something I will come back to shortly.

Mead’s self is necessarily liminal because it exists in a constant state of change. It offers a version of self that is continually reconstructed. There is no fixed point where identity exists, only new spheres of experience where selves are constantly emerging. Similarly, for Bhabha, the essentialist view of self-as-identity (implying a centeredness), is replaced with the concept of *identification*. The self is reliant on the discourse of an ‘other’ (or others) as multiple points of reference. This relationship may be one of shifting connectedness or distance and is constantly reconstructed. The self is decentred and can never be fixed due to its constantly changing relationship with the other, upon which its own position is reliant.

Notions of identification are incorporated into, and appropriated by, socio-political discourse concerning who we are and where we belong. Any discussion on identity is inherently linked to social position, status and belongingness. Therefore, any discourse

of identity must be considered in terms of broader social and political factors. Issues of class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, race, physical ability and access to various types of capital and other networks of power relations all enter the frame of analysis. The ability to construct and articulate identities is dependent on the trajectories and intersections of these factors. Consequently, individual identification is implicitly related to the supposed identity of larger social units, through some level of interpretation, incorporation or rejection.

Stuart Hall has talked in the past about the importance of 'routes' as opposed to 'roots' (1996: 4). Following Hall, it appears futile to look for some essential source of identity because identities do not form in isolation and because they evolve and change over time. Instead, the analysis of identities shifts to the process of their formation – the centripetal and centrifugal forces that stabilise and destabilise their composition.

Barth (1966, 1969, 1981), Eidheim (1969, 1971), and Sökefeld (1999) illustrated the shifting nature of ethnic identity in a variety of anthropological contexts. This 'transactional' analysis, generally associated with Frederik Barth, has been referred to as the 'formalist' (Eriksen 1991) or 'situational' (Hitchcock 1999) approaches cultural identity. Ethnic and cultural identity is renegotiated according to the political context and power relationships determine how identities and specific performances of self are articulated. This transactional analysis contextualises identities that are directly related to certain spheres of interaction. As Eriksen argued, the emphasis moves from substance to form, statics to dynamics, property to relationships and structure to process (1991: 128). For Barth and others, the focus shifts from what is simply inside cultures to the power relationships shared by cultural groups and the processes by which boundaries are constructed and maintained between them.

Transactional approaches to cultural identity have received considerable criticism (Barth 1981, Eriksen 1991). The principal criticism is that analysis focusing on specific

social events is essentially atemporal or synchronic. By focusing on specific situations, there is also the danger of neglecting broader socio-political contexts in which these relationships exist (Eriksen 1991).

The pressing questions concern the extent to which explanations can be sought inside or outside of specific contexts. As Bourdieu (1977) argued, it is impossible to understand human behaviour through the exploration of objective abstract systems of society. Simultaneously, treating social situations in isolation from larger societal structures and institutions appears to have limited use. Therefore, it is equally unfeasible to look to microstudies of people's interactions. Bourdieu proposed to understand the relationship between individuals (as members of groups and classes) and broader societal forces through the notion of 'habitus'.

For Bourdieu, habitus is an inescapable process of subtle conditioning. Self-definition (modes of thinking, knowing and behaving) is formed and stabilised through the socialising forces of the family, peer groups, juridical agencies, the media and the educational system. This conditioning is the result of people incorporating structuring structures that continually dominate their lives. For Bourdieu, one's acquired habitus determines one's opportunities and choices, and for that matter, their perceptions of any possible opportunities and choices.

While Bourdieu's habitus seems somewhat deterministic, it is undeniable that broader sets of forces simultaneously frame and permeate social situations and particular utterances. These factors underpin them and inevitably work through them, often without the conscious knowledge of the actors involved. However, I am suggesting that the dialogic process of interpretation and translation leaves room for an agency that is suppressed in the concept of habitus. I do not intend to rehearse the critiques levelled against Bourdieu's habitus as these have already received adequate academic space (Evens 1999, DiMaggio 1979, Jenkins 1982, 1992, King 2000). I simply want to

highlight the importance of the idiosyncrasies of specific individuals in breaking, resisting or subverting this supposed habitus in the construction of identities. Admittedly, we are positioned by broader social, economic or political forces, although, in translating these forces, we have opportunities to transform them in specific contexts. The discussion on identity must necessarily consider the issues in relation to the social situations in which they manifest themselves. For example, the concept of class has limited use if treated apart from the social context in which it appears (Bourdieu 1987). Upbringing, education, primary and secondary socialisation, and the subsequent access to various types of capital has direct bearing on people's social position (Bourdieu 1984, 1986). Consequently, the material and economic conditions of human existence underpins the basis for people's sense of proximity. However, to account for this, it is essential to look at the specific actions of individuals and groups of people *in relation to* abstract to socio-political and economic forces. I have sought to account for these forces as they manifest themselves in the social interaction of specific individuals.

Therefore, to respond to the question of whether there are explanations outside of context, I would say there are causal explanations that may indeed be located in broader issues concerning societal structures. However, when considering cultural identification, it is only possible to account for these issues as part of a contextual analysis. Therefore, issues of 'structure' and 'agency' are simultaneously addressed.

The usefulness of the transactional approach is that it makes analysis of social identity possible without initially reifying cultures (Eriksen 1991: 131). This is particularly relevant when considering commercial ecologies of hospitality where notions of stable or coherent groups and cultures are problematic. Consequently, the relationship between identity and ecology is essentially diachronic and relates to a broader context. However, the performance of contextualised identities or the contextual limits of identity performances remain a central issue. This is made possible through situational analysis.

Following Goffman (1990), social life may be interpreted as a series of micro-dramas where presentations of self in visible front regions are tied to situationally defined roles and expectations. Within hidden back regions, these expectations may be less closely observed or abandoned altogether. Performances of self change according to the relationship between the performer and his or her audience. However, while certain performances of self may be *more* consciously inauthentic, contemporary feminist and poststructuralist critiques problematise the reality or authenticity of all selves. Instead, identities are the discourses of self, materialised in material and representational practices.

In the following section, I will examine further the performative practices of identity with specific emphasis on sexuality. Sexuality was not a specific theme in my original research plan. However, since my principal research site was a sexualised space, it became necessary to gain a more intensive understanding of sexuality as an essential aspect of identity.

Identity and sexuality

It has been argued, that there is nothing inherently natural about sexuality, just as there is nothing natural about gender as a classification (cf. Butler 1993). These classificatory statuses and labels all emerge through the continued re-articulation of a public political discourse. Notions of gendered and sexualised selves arise through complex sets of regulatory regimes that are made to appear natural. However, following the previous discussions on identity, sexual identity is never a predetermined and stable entity. It is, as Fuss argued: “less a matter of final discovery than perpetual reinvention” (1991:6-7). Gender and sexuality are fabrications that have no essential substance and

classifications are materialised through their continued enactment or performance (Butler 1999, 1993, 1991).

For Butler: “gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being” (Butler 1999: 43-4). What is important to question is how sexuality and sexual identities become visible, and what regulatory schemas make it appear in specific forms. How sexualities: “become codified – even stylised – and how that codification informs the subjectivity of our sexed selves” (Bell and Valentine 1995a: 143). In part, this is concerned with the way certain performances of sexualised selves are celebrated in certain social spheres and how they are punished or regulated in others. Simultaneously, it is important to consider how codified sexual performances become signifiers of identity and social position. How identities, as semiotic practises, are appropriated by commercial agents who seek to redeploy them for commercial gain.

“Social histories of sexual minorities have shown us how vital this performative vocabulary can be, both as a making of difference (from heterosexual hegemonies) and as a marking of sameness (creating a cohesive group identity essential for the formation of recognisable ‘communities’ and so on)” (ibid.). Specific signifying practices are mobilised in the formation of larger social units. These signifiers act as the visible points of commonality around which people gather. Within sexualised neo-tribes, discourses of sexual identity act as ideological focal points. It is the organisation and negotiation of these discourses and their signifiers that are important here. More specifically, how these negotiations operate in the production of material, political and symbolic ecologies among networks of social agents. With this in mind, the following section develops the interrelated issues of identity and social organisation through a critical examination of space.

Space and spatial practices

The immediate concerns of spatial analysis are the physical qualities of spaces and objects in an ergonomic sense. Of course, objects are 'socialised' and become props within interactional routines, although I am referring here to a narrower ecological perspective. Certain physical acts, gestures and bodily motions are not immediately related to the abstractions of sociality. The physical organisation of space – size, furnishings and layout for example – also shape human action. In themselves, they are not social but purely physical. Naturally, an analysis of human behaviour based on physicality alone would be wholly inadequate. Nevertheless, the influence of physical ecology is taken into account. In particular, I consider how the organisation of physical space determines proximity relations.

Any consideration of the nature of social organisation and identification relies on seeing space as a more complex set of processes. Beyond its physicality, space is the concrete abstraction of mobilised capital. Spatial analysis is linked to a broader social, economic and political critique concerning the organisation of society. Simultaneously, the production of space is inevitably related to socio-political acts as people engage with symbolic territories. Consequently, the analysis of socio-spatial organisation must consider the physical and abstract nature of space simultaneously. This is made possible through Lefebvre's (1991) concepts of 'spatial practices', 'representations of space' and 'representational spaces'.

Spatial practices refer to the organisational practices of 'societies' (if such entities can be said to exist), but must also refer to the practices of smaller social networks and groups. These practices are reflected in their ability to produce their spaces, whether real or symbolic. Consequently, spatial practices relate to the specific organisation and deployment of human labour and capital in production relationships.

For Lefebvre, representations of space are the conceptions of social space that appear in purposefully organised representational practices. Lefebvre refers to the representations of cartographers, scientists and urban planners although this must inevitably include writers, journalists and marketing agents.

The last concept, representational spaces refer to the actual experiences of social organisation. "Space as directly lived through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of 'inhabitants' and 'users'" (1991: 39). This space has already been subjected to codification and is already part of a system of signs. These are abstracted spaces of cultural practices that the: "imagination seeks to change and appropriate" (ibid.), in the process of cultural translation.

The three elements exist in constant dialectic as they function interdependently to (re)produce space. The usefulness of Lefebvre's approach lies in three areas. First, it incorporates broader social-political and economic forces that intersect within a specific locale, although are not limited to that locale. Second, space is treated as a dynamic process as opposed to a fixed and visibly apprehendable entity. Third, Lefebvre employs the body as a fundamental part of socio-spatial practices. "Organized gestures, which is to say ritualized and codified gestures, are not simply performed in 'physical' space, in the space of bodies. Bodies themselves generate spaces, which are produced by and for their gestures" (1991: 216).

Burkitt (1999) develops a similar argument where the body is seen as a critical agency in the production of our sense of selves and our social spaces. For Burkitt, the body is the site where the sensual and the cognitive intersect; consequently, embodied action is simultaneously about knowing and doing – competence and engagement, which then develop new competences. The body is caught up in complex representational practices and power relationships that transform and appropriate the meaning of human action. However, physical embodied actions create new subjective understandings as people

continually engage with the human and the non-human; therefore, bodily performance reflects knowledge that produces altered versions of social spaces. Burkitt and Lefebvre's emphasis on the embodied performative reflects the ecological connectedness I have been suggesting, where the performances of self are linked to the production of space.

Where Mead chose to dismiss the relationship between the self and the body, Lefebvre's spatial dialectic collapses this artificial division. The constructions of identities (as socially bounded bodily performances) are implicitly linked to the production of social space. In a reciprocal way, the production of social space determines the nature of these performances (Shields 1991). As the discussion on 'camp' below illustrates, it is through an understanding of the embodied processes of identification that we can begin to understand the experience of hospitality space.

Within the following pages, I will draw on Lefebvre's approach and outline the relationship between identity, sexuality, group and space.

I have already pointed to the fragile nature of identity, and sexuality in particular, as a form of identification. Patriarchal heterosexuality represents the dominant social-sexual form of spatial organisation (Knopp 1992, Valentine 1993a, 1993b). The reassertions of heterosexual relationships, in the visibility of marriage for example, institutionalise and normalise this within public discourse. Sexuality, and in particular, 'dissident' sexuality, is excluded from the public realm into marginal and invisible geographies (cf. Humphreys 1970).⁷ Additionally, resistance to continually asserted heterosexuality in the creation of gay space often fails to challenge the patriarchal nature of spatial organisation. Consequently, gender continues to be the basis of marginalisation beyond sexuality (see Pritchard et al 2002 for example).

The successful articulations of visible dissident sexual identities (whether gay, lesbian, bisexual, transvestite or transsexual) depends on the ability to create social space

through performative and representational practices, and the mobilisation of capital. In part, this relies on politicising sexual visibility through addressing issues of citizenship and human rights (cf. Geltmaker 1992). Simultaneously, visibility is directly related to the economics of social organisation. The increasing recognition of the 'pink pound' as a viable source of income has undoubtedly helped gay consumers to be recognised as a legitimate social group (Binnie 1995). However, recognition as a consumer group is not reflected in other areas of civil rights such as marriage. "Visibility in commodity culture is in this sense a limited victory for gays who are welcome to be visible as consumer subjects but not as social subjects" (Hennessy 1995: 32).

The politics of sexual visibility are intertwined with the organising mechanism of late-modernity. Subcultures materialise as niche markets and segmented consumer groups (Thornton 1995). Citizenship is directly dependent on access to various sorts of capital, which determines social mobility (Evans 1993). In part, this is reflected in the increased visibility of gay consumers in the retail sector as both the potential producers and consumers of fashion (Dyer 2001). Similarly, specialised communicational interests including publishing, radio and new media, even gay tour operators are all indicative of this focus on emerging consumer segments. New markets are being realised in healthcare and 'social interests', such as fertility treatments, AIDS treatment and adoption services. Commercial hospitality venues in particular – as physical, economic and symbolic spaces of visibility – are prime examples of this consumer citizenship.

Commercial hospitality (as economic visibility) coincides with the representations of space, especially in popular media. The majority of mainstream newspapers and magazines now feature listings about gay venues and articles about gay lifestyles. This is supplemented by a wide range of specialist media, oriented toward a gay and lesbian audience. At the same time, gay and lesbian entertainers and presenters are increasingly recognised and promoted by media organisations. On the one hand, these increase the

potential visibility of certain expressions of sexual dissidence as legitimate categories of selves. However, these serve to 'spectacularise' sexuality, which may actually work against the integration of dissident sexuality into the 'everyday' frame. Sexuality and the performances of sexual identity become another form of spectacle, potentially objectified and open to further surveillance. Here, the 'gaze' is not so much directed by restriction but one of amusement. As Moran et al (2001) and Pritchard et al (2002) argued, gay venues become theatres and gay consumers the actors, performing to an expectant audience.

Of course, not every sexual dissident wants to be integrated into the 'everyday' heterosexual realm. The maintenance of distinction and dissidence offers certain securities. In part, delineated space, especially in the commercial hospitality context, offers security from potential violence. Moreover, gay spaces remain essential symbolic focal points and nexuses where networks of support and mutuality are articulated. Similarly, delineated space relates directly to particular types of social encounters and expectations. As many informants commented: 'in gay places you know where you stand. You are not going waste time chatting someone up just to find out they are straight.' This last comment may be a crude reflection of these networks of sociality although it signifies the importance of sexuality as themes of commonality.

Homogeneity and the collective production of sexualised space simultaneously reflect more immediate physical and emotional needs, as well as broader ideological forces. In the immediate sense, gay space offer opportunities for the consumption of a variety of 'things' and experiences. In the broader sense, the creation and maintenance of gay space reflects ideological concerns about citizenship and empowerment through collectivity. Delineated spaces of commercial hospitality represent accessible 'public' spaces that can simultaneously function as intimate private spheres.

Encouraging consumers to participate continually in specific spaces, and to articulate their sexual dissidence there, reflects an ideological recruitment. Continued patronage reflects an economic and a performative commitment to commercial spaces as a way to maintain it as social-sexual territory. Consequently, the production of gay space is simultaneously liberating and constricting.

Gay space at once represents the potential for containment and repression. The metaphor of the 'closet', as hidden spaces where liminal selves exist, takes on broader meanings. Gay bars, as closeted spaces of marginality, are points of exclusion and control. However, Knopp (1994), following Sedgwick (1991), argues that the 'closet', in its broader sense, can be perceived in more optimistic ways.

Closets are also spaces of resistance and empowerment. While preventing the development of a group consciousness through formal institutions and practices, they may actually facilitate it in other ways. For example, closet dwellers can draw on their uniquely contradictory experiences to develop subtle codes and cues recognizable only to others who share their closeted desires. Similarly, closets afford queers with the power to control who is or who is not aware of their sexual difference. (Knopp 1994: 655)

Gay spaces, especially in hospitality contexts, present certain opportunities to articulate sexualised selves collectively where exchanges of hospitality become accessible symbolic terrains. Moreover, although the spaces of commercial hospitality represent restricted and contextualised articulations of selves, these have the potential to move beyond that context.

So far, I have discussed the performance of dissident sexual identities in terms of specific spatial and representational practices. I will now turn my attention to

Lefebvre's representational *lived* spaces. The extended case study developed within this thesis looks to the lived experience in the production of social space. The relationship between the body and identity becomes acutely evident within these lived spaces.

The performances of self operate through the body although this does not mean the body is the singular vehicle for identity. Nor does this mean the body is treated as an empty sign, strategically deployed in the act of signification. The experience of hospitality, though not limited to the physical, is experienced through the body. Within sexualised space, the body has the potential to become a visual or physical consumable.

People's physical co-presence in the hospitality context is one potential way for individuals to interact as a social unit. Individual sexuality is articulated in relation to cultural and communal expressions of sexual identity; social spaces are enacted and continually performed. This does not imply that sexual dissidents all act the same; the signifier of sexual dissidence serves to reject heterosexuality but does not replace it with an absolute binary opposite. Dissidence offers a series of possibilities that are articulated against the accepted dominant heterosexual. Dissidence, at its most basic level, operates on a common rejection of a heterosexual normativity. Beyond this essential sentiment of commonality i.e., 'we are not straight', mutual interests are articulated through either mediated representational practices or directly performed acts. The performance of sexual identity, through bodily practices, is one way in which sexualised social space is produced. Ideologies become codified as part of performative signifying practices. "Gestural systems embody ideology and bind it to practice. Through gestures, ideology escapes from pure abstraction and performs actions. [...] Gestural systems connect representations of space with representational spaces" (Lefebvre 1991: 215). The routinisation of specific performances of sexual identity (and their common recognition) collectively produces sexualised space.

Binnie (1997), Dyer (1993) and Meyer's (1994) discussion of 'camp' behaviour offers a clear example of this. 'Camp', as a widely recognised bodily performance of sexual dissidence, is a way for gay men to produce their social space. The importance of performance and camp are continually emphasised throughout this thesis. The performative practices implied in representational spaces produce symbolic territories. These codified performances produce social space by separating inside from outside; who performs them, when they are performed and in whose company reflects moral, aesthetic territories of self. Similarly, rejection of these expressions or versions of sexual dissidence emphasise the way these spaces are marked out. Specific performative routines locate sexuality in physical as well as abstract symbolic and political space, making them apprehendable. Bodily performances operate alongside the other representational and spatial practices that were outlined above. Sexuality comes to materialise through the consumption of hospitality, within this dialectic of performance, representation and the mobilisation of capital.

The production of sexualised space, directly relates to the ownership over symbolic territories or properties. However, property is not just about relationships of ownership but also about the processes of ordering (Davies 1998):

Property is no longer a thing, a relationship between a person and a thing, or a network of relationships between persons with respect to a thing. Property is not even a bundle of rights. It is a metaphor for an array of concepts centred on hierarchy, purity, and limitedness: exclusivity – property – sovereignty – self-identity – law – territory – boundaries – title – limits – unity. (1998: 147)

The proper in property simultaneously implies the idea of singularity, and in a prescriptive sense, notions of appropriateness and correctness. The production of social

space, to some extent at least, relies on the ability to prescribe and regulate social practices. In the regulation of practice, more 'coherent' and 'proper' articulations of spaces are made possible:

The proper sets up a fixed limit or boundary establishing a territorial operation. In what can only be an act of ideological coercion, it creates insides and outsides by its excluding an other from its own proper domain. Property itself is determined as a set of entitlements which are exclusive to an owner or to the holder of the proprietary interests. Property defines an exclusive territory of rights and responsibilities attaching to each owned thing. (1998: 155)

Within this thesis, I explore the mechanics of these regulatory practices in the consumption and production of hospitality. However, in order to do this, it is necessary to consider three key issues. First, because collective sentiment is implicitly tied to a more or less coherent set of ideological beliefs it is essential to clarify the potential character of ideology. Second, it is necessary to question the nature of power and the exercise of control in relation to the ideologies of social 'groups'. Following from the previous points, the third task is to consider how knowledge is reproduced and preserved within a 'collective memory'. I will address these issues in the remaining part of this chapter.

Ideology

Ideologies have two principal characteristics that have been drawn out in critical definitions. First, ideology is generally understood as an interlinked set of beliefs about

a particular social order (Fine and Sandstrom 1993). Second, belief systems are appropriated and translated, consequently becoming distorted – illusory sets of beliefs (Williams 1977). Ideology concerns a series of evaluative activities concerning what ‘ought’ to be (Fine and Sandstrom 1993). As such, it represents something that has to be constantly reconsidered, reproduced and performed. In that sense, ideologies are always ‘becoming’.

In her epilogue to a volume on symbol and politics in communal ideology, Moore (1975) offered a useful approach to the relationship between ideology and social groupings. Moore was particularly critical of theories that assume ideologies coherently underpin or justify social formations, which she referred to as the ‘congruence’ approach. Alternatively, Moore proposed a ‘processual’ approach to ideology, which accommodates the potential for idiosyncrasy and indeterminacy. More specifically, where ideologies are considered as something to be constantly reproduced, the processual approach considers the way ideologies are adjusted (and potentially regulated) situationally among social agents.

The previous sections have argued that social commonality, identification and the production of mutual space have a clear ideological dimension. However, following Moore, critical questions have to be asked about the relationship between ideology, the neo-tribes or *communitas* model of social organisation, and the production and consumption of hospitality space. More specifically, if neo-tribes and *communitas* are ideologically grounded, to what extent do ideologies remain constant, acting as a relatively fixed point that people gather around? Alternatively, is it more reasonable to argue that the mutual presence of people create a shared ideology? How do notions of identity help or hinder particular formations or articulations of ideology? Lastly, how do particular ideologies influence the process of identification?

In constructing ecologies of hospitalities, the 'hosts' initially mobilise a set of understandings (socially meaningful myths) through semiotic and performative strategies. Semiotic strategies primarily concern the physical ecology, i.e., the decoration and the atmosphere created through semiotic carriers such as music. Performative strategies may be semiotic themselves, although they refer specifically to the human contributions to the creation of hospitality space. The role of the host, primarily the management and staff in the commercial context, is to create and maintain certain social orders. In the first instance, understandings concerning the milieu or the social order are spatialised, becoming mythological focal points for would-be participants. Hospitality venues become potential spaces of play or spaces of social association for those who wish to participate.

This is the ideological 'interpellation' or recruitment as Althusser (1984) saw it. Mobilised ideologies 'hail' or call out to those who feel they are addressed by it. In other words, ideologies and positions in relation to ideologies are dialogic phenomena, which include a potential 'broadcaster' and an 'audience' that recognises the signals as signs.

However, where discourses about a social order become localised, these locations are simultaneously sites where ideology is transformed.

Because ideology constantly has to be re-evaluated and reasserted, it remains open to contestation. Therefore, the question of how ideologies materialise in performative signifying practices within the hospitality context remains a central issue. Who are the agents that mobilise ideologies concerning sexual identities? How are they mobilised? How do they change and how are ideological practices, whether physical acts, linguistic practices or any other semiotic strategies regulated? Perhaps to talk of regulation, which implies one-way constrictive practices is incorrect and it is more appropriate to question

the centrifugal and centripetal forces that continually negotiate ideology. These form essential themes for my thesis.

Power, control and geographies of display

There are obvious 'geographies of display' within the service environment (Crang 1994). The bar area for example is a visible 'front region' (Goffman 1990) that has a performative characteristic. These regions of display require certain presentations of self that are unique to specific hospitality contexts. Mars and Nicod's (1984) account of the service industry pointed to a symbolic denial of self during the host-guest encounter. "This means that a waiter must not be seen eating, drinking, smoking, sitting, talking burping farting or anything else which signifies being human" (1984: 101). In other words, the host substitute socially oriented performances of self with those more appropriate for the service encounter.

Mars and Nicod drew a difference between open or closed boundary interactions. Closed boundary implies greater distance between host and guest, as their roles and positions are defined by formal service rituals. This type of boundary-closed interaction is accompanied by the presentation of a formal self and the potential denial of individuality described above. Conversely, the service environment in the principal case study reflected boundary-open transactions where there was little formality distancing host from guest. Moreover, the hospitality encounter here relied on accelerated and amplified performances of a social self.

I have already discussed the potential role of emotional labour in the commercial hospitality context. Management directly attempts to orchestrate the service encounter through specific regulatory schemes, which effectively serves to reinforce the social order (Hochschild 1983, Crang 1994). In *Harvester* restaurants, guests always receive

the same scripted welcome upon arrival, where the service rituals and buffet cart privileges are set out. In *T.G.I. Friday's*, staff are 'encouraged' to wear a hat of their choice and decorate their braces with badges. This serves to create a sense of individuality for the staff while reflecting the ludic character of the dining experience.

In reinforcing the social order, management seek to orchestrate the place-myths, which consequently help reproduce that social order in the future. The identities of front line staff are appropriated and embodied performances of self are regulated at the organisational level (Hochschild 1983, Crang 1994, 1997, 2000, Tyler and Hancock 2001). More importantly, the production of these social orders within hospitality space draws on the guest or consumer's 'directed' performances of self.

The principal issues remain those of control over ideology and the reconstruction of commonly reasserted understandings (myths). This in turn is directly linked to nature of social organisation and the potential role of identity politics. Hospitality ecologies reflect the neo-tribal or *communitas* models of social engagement, based on common sentiment, where participants (or observers) come to identify with certain myths, or not. It is this engagement with, and identification in relation to, certain networks of agents and their ideologies that concerns us. Those seeking to participate in a social milieu must be prepared, to some extent, to observe the social order and behave appropriately. Their individual identities become dialogically linked to the identities of others present. In this sense, the appropriateness of self does not necessarily come directly from the organisation. The necessity for appropriate performances of self comes from the potential for participation. A useful conceptual tool to understand this, and the broader culture of tacit control in hospitality ecologies, is Foucault's (1991) notion of *panopticism*.

Foucault analysed the nature of social organisation and the practices of regulation during outbreaks of the plague. The authorities enforced curfews and bureaucratic rules

to assure outbreaks were contained; certain sections of residential areas were isolated and people were quarantined. Consequently, it was the duty of the every citizen to maintain the quarantine and report cases of illness and death. People were not only expected to regulate their own behaviour, but also maintain surveillance over others and effectively police their neighbours.

Foucault's panopticism reflects a constant culture of surveillance and self-regulation in social organisation. The networks of surveillance and control become decentred where the exercise of disciplinary power is transferred from specific institutions to individual agents. The culture of surveillance and regulation becomes an intrinsic part of sociality and notions of belongingness are dependent on mutually defined and regulated performances of identity.

Sexual identities, especially within gay male culture, are directly tied to the production and consumption of the 'spectacle'. As I argued above, performances of sexuality became 'spectacularised' as a way for gay culture to become a visible social and political entity. This visibility often goes hand-in-hand with the mobilisation of economic, aesthetic, social and cultural capital. In particular, political and social citizenship is increasingly dependent on the ability to articulate economic visibility (Binnie 1995, Evans 1993, Hennessy 1995). Conspicuous consumption and economic visibility are tied to mutual awareness and specific performances of self that correspond to complex lifestyle genres. Therefore, the culture of self-presentation and surveillance already implicates identity in capital-oriented modes of social organisation. This mutual awareness instils a sense of self-consciousness so would-be participants in a culture or subculture regulate their own behaviour in order to participate.

This model of mutual regulation and performative obligations is certainly applicable to the private and social contexts of hospitality. If we recognise that the commercial spheres of hospitality simultaneously become the sites for private and social hospitality

exchanges, it becomes apparent that those obligations may be mobilised within organisational contexts.

The commercial producers of hospitality are confronted with a number of issues. The initial concern is with the *basis of association*: the ideological and mythological basis for communal sentiment that set up the parameters for collective identity. The second is the *obligations of association*: the necessary criteria for association, belonging and identification. This study examines how the owners/managers infuse the basis of association with the existence of the commercial hospitality space, which makes it possible to mobilise the obligations of association in the production of commercial hospitality space.

This may seem like a deterministic view of control in the production and consumption of hospitality space, although this is not my intention. I continually argue that serendipitous and purposive agencies transform social ecologies as they are performed and produced. The spaces of hospitality are actively appropriated through certain 'bodily practices' and 'acts of representation' (Aubert-Gamet 1997).

Following Aubert-Gamet, 'bodily practices' refer to the physical actions where individuals place their own authority over space. Consumers will, albeit temporarily, personalise space by introducing or manipulating particular objects and exercising certain patterns of behaviour. This allows them to make space accommodate their individual, social and ethical needs. Reflecting the notions of embodiment I discussed above, consumers will sit and stand in ways that demarcates and encloses spaces. People move furniture, talk loudly across the bar, ask for certain music or play music on the jukebox and dance around (sometimes on the furniture) as their needs demand.

However, it is important to recognise the role management plays. By *allowing* certain patterns of behaviour to go on, management legitimises these definitions of space. Managers sanction certain consumers to place their authority over space, which enables

consumers to practice specific types of social rituals that come to characterise place. These can be used to reproduce appropriate versions of the place-images and the place-myths.

In terms of representation, the consumers, particularly through linguistic practices, stamp their authority over their social space (Aubert-Gamet 1997). Labelling a particular bar as 'gay' and projecting certain moral values on to the hospitality space is just one example. More importantly, within this 'gay space', they can assert their rights – as gay consumers – to engage in open displays of affection.

Arguably, this appropriation can be seen as a continuous process of contestation and disruption. Nevertheless, the system of ideologies and myths continue to be reproduced, and thus reflect some consistency. In order to understand this paradoxical relationship, it is necessary to consider the way knowledge is exchanged and reproduced within specific hospitality ecologies.

Memory and the reproduction of knowledge

Within hospitality ecologies, the reproduction of knowledge operates through socially organised memories and mnemonic practices. In line with the preceding discussion, memory is treated as a process as opposed to a stable entity. My aim is to avoid treating memory either as an object or as subjective constructions.

Consequently, my analysis does not focus on the cognitive or psychological process of remembering. Fentress and Wickham's (1992) discussion of psychological or neurological approaches illustrates the problems of treating memory independently from social contexts. As Halbwachs argued: "it is in society that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognize, and localise their memories" (1992: 38). Halbwachs (1980, 1992) proposed the notion of a 'collective

memory', which refers to collective recollection, commemoration and representation. The act of remembering remains an individual act but the individual mind is no longer the exclusive location for the storage of memory. As Halbwachs argued: "[memories] are recalled by me externally, and the groups of which I am a part at any given time give me the means to reconstruct them, upon the condition, to be sure, that I turn toward them and adopt, at least for the moment, their way of thinking" (1992: 38).

Our ability to access certain genres of memories, linked to certain groups or places for example, is dependent on our proximity relationship with others. These others either have direct experience, or are in a position to comment and help us to remember, or indeed to forget. There is the danger here of neglecting individual consciousness in emphasising the role of group in remembering. However, memories cannot be thought of as 'social facts' existing independently of the people that mobilise them. The term collective memory is not a denial of agency or subjectivity, rejecting the possibility for independent recollection by individuals. The notion of a collective memory is concerned with our ability to recall or access and articulate culturally specific knowledge. Consequently, it is inherently linked to notions of power and group dynamics; certain memories are legitimated, while others are ignored, forgotten or suppressed (Middleton and Edwards et al 1990).

Admittedly, the term 'collective memory' is misleading. Partly because it implies a coherent group or social unit, but also because it implies coherence in memory, as both object and process. The notion of a collective memory is useful as a 'sensitising concept' and does not refer to its instrumental characteristic as an 'operational concept' (Blumer 1931). It raises awareness of a social framework for remembering as opposed to defining a specific social process (Olick and Robbins 1998).

An alternative is the notion of a 'dialogic memory', which links together the individual with broader mnemonic processes of recollection and representation. Olick (1999) has

already employed Bakhtin's understanding of language as a simultaneous site of, and process for, the articulation of collective held memories. Again, the central theme is not language, but the characteristics of dialogue, in the metaphorical sense. Individuals may be sites for the expression of shared memories, but individuals do not remember in isolation. Specific clusters of objects (as signs), individual acts, or utterances, contain traces of the past. These may be reflections of an immediate shared experience or some broader history. Symbols and actions (as cues to recollection or aids in perception) operate in the same way within the hospitality contexts.

I have already discussed the conceptual basis for this dialogic memory. Myths operate through Lefebvre's spatial dialectic where the complex genres are reproduced. Remembering (and forgetting) occurs through lived experience, representational practice and directly relies on the mobilisation of various forms of capital. Within commercial hospitality ecologies, the process of remembering operates through construction and reproduction of the social order. This in turn relies on conscious performative and semiotic displays where broader networks of knowledge and discourse are spatialised. Within these specific locations, the construction of memory is simultaneously regulated and disrupted at the interpersonal, social and organisational levels.

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to develop a more complex understanding of both hospitality, and the host-guest relationships in its production and consumption. Problematising the very essence of hospitality allows us appreciate its significance as an object of academic study. Hospitality is no longer reduced to a set of operational issues; instead, the ecological analogy places the processes of hospitality exchange at the centre

of sociality. Meanwhile hospitality spaces become key sites for the construction and articulation of the social. This broader appreciation of hospitality can now be used to examine critically the business of hospitality.

Admittedly, the commercial hospitality context appears to be another potential site of exploitation and manipulation. However, this should not be seen as another dystopic critique of late modernity. Hospitality ecologies are produced and consumed through conflicting agencies that open up possibilities for new forms of sociality while closing down others. It is *because* contradictory agencies seek to prescribe social relations that opportunities exist for the expression of alternative socialities.

The concept of ecology offers a rich metaphor for understanding the production and conception of hospitality space. The next step is to move the discussion from the conceptual realm and locate it in a specific context. In order to do this, the following chapter introduces the case study sites.

Notes

¹ See Weber, M. (1968) *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretative Sociology*, Vol. 1, New York: Bedminster, p243

² Don Smith, who translated Maffesoli's text, used the word *puissance* as opposed to translating it as 'power'. 'Puissance' in French conveys an 'inherent energy' and a 'vital force' that is different to institutions of power ('pouvoir') (1996: 1, trans. note).

³ Quote taken from Turner (1982: 28)

⁴ The "-oid" in liminoid is taken from the Greek-*eidōs* meaning 'like' or 'resembling'. The *liminoid* resembles the *liminal* without being identical to it.

⁵ I am using the term 'carnavalesque' as it was developed by Mikhail Bakhtin (1984). For Bakhtin the essence of carnival was the ritualised symbolic inversion of the normal. The carnivalesque spirit is a socio-political project where existing discourses of social order are challenged. See Bakhtin, M.M. (1984) *Rabelais and his World*, translated by Iswolsky H., Bloomington, Ind: Indiana University Press)

⁶ For Mead see Strauss (1956) in the bibliography.

⁷ 'Dissidence' is regularly used as an umbrella term to describe all those who in some way have rejected heterosexuality; however, I do not know its origin.

Chapter 3 The Research Contexts

What, where and how

The aim of my research was to consider the way social commonality and identification was articulated through the consumption of hospitality. I assumed the most useful way to understand how commonality may (or may not) operate was by observing social interaction in contexts, and by discussing people's experiences with them. This would offer a richer understanding of the social context and the individual biographies of those consuming within these contexts. I began with an informal pilot study of London venues and soon realised that questionnaires were inappropriate for the task (Lugosi and Peacock 2000). In part, this was because the information I wanted could not be addressed in a few short answers, but also because people were reluctant to complete questionnaires during their leisure time. The questions I wanted to ask relied on a certain rapport between the researcher and the researched, which questionnaires compromised. This issue of rapport is something I shall return to in chapter 4.

The research process was conducted in a number of stages. From the beginning of my acceptance as a doctoral candidate, I looked for potential research sites. The essential criteria were that social spaces needed to be geographically, economically, temporally, socially and ethically accessible. I made exploratory visits to bars, restaurants and clubs in an attempt to understand the social characteristics of the clientele. During these visits I attempted to interpret the culture of the social space (if such a thing existed), and the boundaries involved in consumption. An unfortunate by-product of my research is that any visit to a commercial hospitality venue had the potential to become another source of information. This blurred the distinction between what was effectively a work context, and a leisure context.

These initial visits raised a wealth of conceptual themes and made me realise it was useful to focus on a small number of places. Focussing on specific spaces allowed me to consider issues of change over time. I attempted to identify who the clientele were and how they associated with others inside the venue. It soon became evident that in order to interrogate the social processes of hospitality based relationships I needed to concentrate on a specific social milieu.

As with most people, I found out about the *Freelands* serendipitously following a conversation with a friend.¹ We were both surprised there was gay bar in a town like Compton, and we decided to visit the *Freelands* soon after.

I did not attempt to hide my heterosexuality. Admittedly, I did not walk around publicly declaring it either. It is interesting to note that on a number of occasions, when I began casual conversations with people in the bar, in a clearly defensive act, they immediately declared they were 'straight' in order to establish role boundaries. I did not use my sexuality as the primary signifier; I did not walk around 'out and proud' wearing my heterosexuality as a badge to be immediately flashed upon a first encounter. I preferred to be a person first and then a sexual being. Instead, I often mentioned girlfriends as a way to highlight my sexuality as part of a casual conversation. It could be argued that I played on ambiguity, treating my presence as natural, as opposed to carving out an overtly heterosexual space for myself. When asked, I told people I was not gay, and although most did not care, some, simply did not believe. When the managers found out I was straight, they seemed to find this a constant source of amusement.

I visited the *Freelands* on a number of occasions 'socially' and found that it helped to address the issues of my studies.² First, it represented the neo-tribal or communitas model of collectivity based on a common sentiment. In this case, sexuality was the principal basis of association. What was particularly interesting was how straight people simultaneously visited the bar. More importantly, gay and straight consumers often

mixed and there did not appear to be an apparent divide between people on the grounds of sexual preference. Of course, this naïve perception was soon challenged as I began to understand the basis of proximity relations.

Second, the *Freelands* was located in a quiet suburban area of a town with a reputation for violence and intolerance. The place-image of the town and the place-myth of the bar represented visibly different social orders. This apparently conflicting relationship between the character of hospitality space and the broader social and political geography helped to develop the ecological approach to hospitality space. This also led me to question the strategies and tactics for maintaining the division between these social orders through specific modes of exclusion and boundary maintenance.

Third, the *Freelands* had, what I initially thought, was a clear place-image and place-myth as a gay space. However, as I found out, these images and myths were not unified but contested understandings. The customer base reflected some consistency as gay and lesbian consumers appeared to frequent the bar. However, the configurations of customers changed during different times of the day, week and month. Therefore, it became essential to examine how these spatialised images and myths were reinforced or challenged by different sets of consumers.

Fourth, I discovered that the *Freelands* did not advertise its existence. Following many informal conversations with customers, I realised the majority of them found out about the *Freelands* through social contacts. On the one hand, this highlighted the importance of the consumer in maintaining the hospitality venue. Simultaneously, this emphasised the significance of network relationships in the reproduction of knowledge and the dissemination of information.

Fifth, the *Freelands* was geographically, financially and socially accessible. Due to the size and culture of the bar, the management were always visible and active participants in the bar activities. They encouraged a welcoming atmosphere and were usually very

talkative. In a similar way, the customers often talked to each other, even when they did not know each other. In addition to this, my age and physical appearance meant people often noticed me and engaged me in conversation. My inquisitive sociability reflected an obvious enthusiasm for participation. Obviously, it is necessary to acknowledge that many conversations were motivated by the desire to engage in some extended relationship on other people's part. Admittedly, my enthusiasm for conversation no doubt sent mixed messages. However, I always tried to avoid this, and often highlighted my sexuality to avoid potential misunderstandings.

My physical attributes certainly helped me to 'blend in' although this did not mean that I could immediately become a regular or an apparent insider. Nevertheless, I could enter the *Freelands* and see the way I was included and excluded from certain social units. More importantly, I could see the basis for other people's association or distance, or inclusion and exclusion.

These emerging issues encouraged me to spend increasing amounts of time and energy understanding the culture of the *Freelands* and it rapidly became the principal research site. I continued to go to other venues and write-up my experiences and impressions. These presented new ideas and offered some means of comparison, although I did not have the resources to give them equal amounts of attention.

I have included two other cases that help define and contextualise specific research themes. The *Piaf* case in chapter 5 was drawn from a single visit. I have only visited *Piaf* once and the extended account of my experiences is simply used as an illustrative case.

The *Temple* (chapters 3 and 7) acts as a similar illustrative and comparative case. I visited the *Temple* on seven occasions, conducting numerous informal interviews with male and female staff and guests, and taking extensive notes that were expanded on later. I also made several tape recordings of the proceedings and included some extracts

below. I tried to obtain an interview with the current manager of the *Temple* but he declined, saying the: '*Temple* does not like to publicise itself.' This in itself was a useful reflection of the *Temple* as a marginal space and liminoid social institution. He was helpful enough to answer a few questions, but I could not get substantial information on the human resource aspects of the *Temple*. Despite this, the characteristics of the *Temple* meant that even this limited access to the organisation still offered a rich set of data. Following an introduction to the *Freelands*, I will offer some further descriptions of the *Temple* at the end of this chapter.

The Freelands and its surroundings

The following section offers a descriptive account of the principal research context. The first part offers a brief description of the town where the bar is located. For ethical reasons I have kept the descriptions of the town simple; the more detailed the description, the greater the likelihood that the contributors could be identified. I will then go on to consider the organisational characteristics of the town before setting out some key issues concerning the place-image, place-myth and the consumer base. Appendix a offers an extended discussion and analysis of local, regional and general competition.

Compton is located in a borough just outside London. Following the descriptions of the contributors, the town can be described as 'conservative', 'middle-class' with relatively 'rich' and mainly 'white' residents. It was described as an 'intolerant' and 'homophobic area'. The town had a relatively high level of recorded violent crime, especially street assaults, but what was more important was that informants perceived it to be a violent area. This perceived violence was not necessarily homophobic; the town had a number of pubs and bars catering for a younger clientele and fights regularly broke out in and

around these venues. Groups of young men fighting in the streets were commonly circulated images of the town and its inhabitants.

The bar was located in the Northern part of the town in a residential area called the 'village'.³ The village district had four other small pubs, most catering for a more mature clientele from the area. All of the bars in the area had been inns and public houses for decades. As such, all maintained a more 'traditional' appearance, with emphasis on dark wood, and employing mainly earthly tones of brown, green, red and orange colours.

The *Freelands Tavern* or *Freelands* was decorated along similar lines. The service counter and the walls were all dark stained wood. In the beginning, there was a row of fixed seating at the sides of the bar, all covered in a green felt material. Due to years of neglect and underinvestment, there were large holes in the seating where people could literally fall through. The rest of the furniture was an eclectic collection of beaten up chairs and tables from other establishments. The floor was uneven and creaked as people walked around the bar. It was covered by a worn carpet with elaborate patterns of green and brown colours. The dark colours and intricate patterns were the usual sort of practical public house carpeting that hide stains and burns. Over the years, the pattern had been obscured and the greens and browns amalgamated with the other stains.

The smell of stale smoke and alcohol was embedded in every part of the bar. There was an old fan system although we rarely turned it on because of the noise, and it never provided adequate ventilation. It was a small physical space arranged along an L-shape around the bar. There were large French windows to the garden, which were opened during the summer time. The toilets were always cold with brown doors and brown tiling. Most managers put soap in the toilets at one time or another although this was not consistently done. The toilets themselves were kept clean but looked battered. The seats

in the women's toilets frequently came off and anecdotes of women having to perform a careful balancing act were frequent.

Interestingly, as with most bars, the toilets had frames for displaying advertising posters; however, the adverts were not aimed at the pub's target market. In the male toilets, the 'Keep it dirty' campaign for a computer game featured a picture of a young, scantily clad, athletic girl in a provocative pose. Similarly, a poster for a chocolate bar set out toilet etiquette for 'real men' that included looking straight ahead, not talking to others and not looking at yourself in the mirror. The overtly heterosexual connotations of these adverts seemed inappropriate, although many of the customers I discussed this with did not seem to take much notice of them.

A single brown door divided the back area from the front. The door opened up to a corridor, which was used as a cloakroom by the customers. At the front of the corridor, opposite the door to the bar, was a back area with fridges and work surfaces. This back area opened up to the bar at one end, and the kitchen at the other, where there was another back door to the premises. The regular customers often came around the back, drinking, talking and hanging their coats. This was the 'backstage' where gossiping, drug taking and other illicit exchanges took place. During lock-ins, customers would leave through this back area and use the back door to avoid drawing attention. This way it looked like people were leaving the private residence and not the public house.

From the outside, the bar looked like any other public house; it had a hanging sign, and the name of the bar was written in gold lettering above the door. The management put up blinds that were pulled down around six or seven o'clock. There was a garden area and the owners spent several hundred pounds hiring a gardener to plant and maintain the plants, flowers and the lawn. There were also large hanging baskets outside the front of the bar; flowers were the most significant and only visible investment in the bar. In

general, it was run down, and when I asked people how they described the bar, most said it looked, and felt, like an: 'old man's pub.'

Ownership and management

Managers and manageresses

The bar was opened as a gay venue in October 1999. Prior to that, it was known as a 'copper's pub', due to its close proximity to the nearby police station. Throughout the next year, there were three sets of managers, all lasting a few months. Most were fired except one who disappeared, taking several weeks' takings with him. All the previous managers had been relatively young men with little enthusiasm for the licensed trade. After this turbulent first year, the bar had only three different managers between September 2000 and June 2002. Then, between June and October 2002, the management changed twice.

The first manager Wayne opened the bar and ran it very informally. He had the difficult task of creating the client base. Daniel (one of the veteran customers) had been going there since the beginning said Wayne used to give away drinks, especially to those people he liked or 'fancied'. When Daniel or Warren (Daniel's boyfriend) helped Wayne with the shopping, he usually reciprocated with drinks at the bar. Drinks were often used to return favours and many of the customers helped behind the bar. Acts of personal hospitality complemented the commercial aspects of the relationship. He hired boys he found attractive and I was told he even employed a 17-year-old partner to work behind the bar.

After Wayne left, the *Freelands* was taken over by Ross, who ran the bar along similar lines. Personal and social interests were closely linked with commercial commitments.

Tim, who used to help Ross run the *Freelands*, told me one of them would be behind the bar while the other usually sat on the other side talking to the customers.

After Ross left, two young men (Kevin and Roger) took over. As Joyce (a former regular) told me: “they were just in it for the sex and the booze; [...] they used to have loads of little boys hanging around.” Joyce said that on the day of the *Mardi Gras*, Kevin and Roger went out and never came back, leaving her to run the bar for the entire day. Joyce was eventually fired for stealing and drinking behind the bar, although, in the face of this kind of exploitation, her misconduct was understandable. Everybody agreed that the bar was run-down and filthy, although Kevin and Roger used to organise memorable theme parties.

After Kevin and Roger left, the bar was taken over by Shawn and Fifi in September 2000. They ran the bar along with Steve, who later became the manager. Shawn went on holiday in March 2001, and it was during this time I started working there. Fifi offered me a job for a week to fill in for Shawn while he was away. Shawn phoned while abroad claiming he had lost his passport and said he was unable to return for another few weeks.

Eventually, when Shawn did return, he did not come back to manage the bar. Fifi and Steve asked me to work there permanently and the three of us ran the bar for the next few months. Fifi left in the summer of 2001, over a two-month period and Steve and I were left to run the bar. We were the only two regular members of staff, while a range of other people came and went. Some left, but most were fired by Steve for not ‘fitting in’. These people did not have the appropriate rapport with the clients or simply did not show the appropriate level of emotional commitment.

Steve invested a great deal of personal effort into the bar, which was reflected in the length of time he worked there (nearly two years). He redecorated the bar, and the upstairs living areas, and made an effort to keep the place clean. He was joined by

Marcus and the two of them ran the bar until June 2002, when they were dismissed because of continuous stock irregularities and for removing money from the fruit machine.

The bar was then taken over by an older straight woman, Jill, and her Son Al, who ran the bar until September when Al fell ill. The bar was then over by another straight woman, Kate. This was another turbulent period for the *Freelands* and rumours began to spread about it 'turning straight'. Kate's employment put a number of people off from coming to the bar, and many of the regular clients began to stay away. This coincided with the opening of a second gay bar in Compton (see appendix a) and the slower period leading up to Christmas, which led to a decline in takings. At the end of 2002 and the first few months of 2003, several of the principal guests moved away from the area, which also contributed to the decline in takings.

Every change of manager meant an upheaval and a change in the type of clientele. During the first year, the bar attracted more younger men and it was often described as a 'rougher' pub. As managers changed, they brought with them new staff, new customers, and new cliques formed. As I illustrate later (particularly in chapters 7 and 8), new managers and staff renegotiated the social configurations in the bar. Their personal relations determined who were central figures in the bar, and who were excluded and pushed to the periphery.

Ownership and operation

The bar was operated on a 'free house' basis and not tied to a brewery. The actual premises were acquired by a holding company on a long-term loan basis (approximately 20 years). The holding company was owned by two directors who ran a number of other bars and pubs throughout the United Kingdom. The majority of their other bars were

leased and operated on the same basis, although I was told the company directors owned a number of pubs themselves. A few managers said the rented premises were generally neglected in terms of financial investment, while the owned bars and pubs received the majority of money. The two directors also had a number of other business interests including the lease and operation of jukeboxes and fruit machines. Naturally, the *Freelands* had both.

In general, the company as a whole appeared to operate informally as an 'entrepreneurial' venture. Some of the deliveries were irregular as stocks were purchased through a number of suppliers. Sometimes the area manager turned up with cases of spirits or wine and we occasionally received barrels of beer with short expiry periods. If we needed something, like furniture for example, the manager contacted either the area manager or one of the directors, and someone turned up with a lorry full of used furniture. Things like glasses, ashtrays, bar-mats, trays, promotional posters, displays, drinks, cleaning products came from a variety of unknown sources, and often arrived in the back of someone's car.

As with everything else, training was done on an ad hoc basis and there appeared to be little formal training for the managers. New managers often phoned other pubs or past managers to ask how pipes were cleaned, how machines needed to be fixed and how the book-keeping was organised. There was certainly no formal training for the staff. We were shown the basics of how to use the till, put credit cards through, and change barrels. However, most lessons on bar etiquette such as not sitting, reading, eating, smoking, using mobile phones or even being sober behind the bar came from either our own experiences, or it being pointed out by the managers. These were of course informal rules that were open to negotiation; not all the managers cared, and their concerns were often determined by their moods.

In general, it was an easy place to work in. Sometimes, Steve reprimanded us for not cleaning, but for most of the time, we did what we wanted. Everyone drank behind the bar, and people frequently took drugs, especially at weekends. After all, the two managers were expected to run the bar alone, and taking amphetamines almost became a necessity so they could work long hours.

Staff and pay

The number of staff varied. When I started working there, only two people ran the bar, the two managers. In the beginning, for the about the first two years, the pay for management worked on a percentage principle. The managers originally received 15% of the overall weekly takings, which was split among the managers who usually ran the bar as a couple. This undoubtedly served as an incentive to increase the bar's overall takings.

The managers were the only people officially working there. However, I later found out that Fifi was never registered there officially and Steve was working under a fictional national insurance number.

There were no funds set aside for staff and all bar-staff were paid from the manager's wages. However, there was £70 per week set aside for the cleaners; the managers would do the cleaning themselves and keep this money. When I started working there, I was paid from this cleaning money and another £10 came from not putting 10 soft drinks through the till.

During Steve's time as manager, the percentage system changed to a fixed income of around £400; the staff were still paid from the manager's wages and the cleaning money. As far as I knew, Steve and Marcus both supplemented their pay by claiming a

number of state benefits. In addition, they occasionally sold their own vodka, soft drinks and amphetamines to supplement their income.

Staff and access to labour

The majority of the staff were, at one time or another, customers. They were most likely to be young (below 25), male and gay. I only knew of four women that were hired, although only two lasted for more than a few months. This was not because of any persecution or discrimination; they left because they did not feel motivated to work there or they went to better jobs.

Most of the people worked there as second jobs and usually because they spent so much time at the bar as customers. Because the *Freelands* was the only gay venue in the area, it was in the customers' interests to maintain the venture and 'guests' often helped run the bar. As I discuss in chapter 7, working at the bar in one way or another, also offered good opportunities to meet new people and it was common for people to work free of charge. Often favours were repaid in other ways, with drinks, drugs or social inclusion. Again, this is something I discuss in later chapters.

Because the staff tended to be drawn from customers there was little role distance and differentiation between the host and guests. Most of the guests were of a similar age, sex and shared a seemingly common sexuality. We were not expected to wear uniforms, although we occasionally received free promotional t-shirts from drink companies. The only sense of uniformity in clothing came from a sense of identification with certain discourses of gay identity. Tight fitting designer trousers and tops were often worn by staff, although there was no formal regulation on what could or could not be worn. This regulation took a more subtle form and came from the customers and peers. Again, this is something I shall address in more detail in later chapters.

How did I fit into this social milieu? I did not dress in body hugging designer clothes although I had reasonable amounts of aesthetic capital to 'fit in'. At first sight, my commonality only extended as far as I was relatively young and male. The most important thing for me was that the management accepted me for who I was. From then on, the guests did not object to me, although I was singled out for a great deal of attention because of my sexuality. To some, I was 'eye candy', to others, I was a challenge; certain people just said I was in denial, while others just saw me as an enigma. Some saw me as a novelty, others as a crusader who was willing to move beyond the straight/gay divide, while certain people simply saw me for my personality. My role as a researcher opened up some doors, while closing others. Reactions usually, but not consistently, correlated with class and educational factors. Those with higher levels of education, especially those who had been to university, usually saw my work as interesting. Others, usually less well-educated people, did not understand my work and tended to pay less attention to my well-rehearsed explanations.

Customer base, place-image and place-myth

A first point concerns the culture of the bar as gay space. There were important issues about how notions of gayness, and discourses of gay identity, were constructed, and more importantly, how people positioned themselves in relation to these discourses. However, I will return to these issues throughout. From a marketing perspective, having a defined target market (which can be broadly, although inaccurately, described as gay) presented a number of potential advantages and disadvantages. Initially, this target market was useful as it was possible to position the product and target that specific segment. Lesbian and gay consumers already have specific marketing channels in specialist magazines and publications, and dedicated websites. Additionally, gay listings

appear in what are not exclusively gay oriented media, such as *Time Out*, and other national newspapers. However, on closer inspection it becomes obvious that the gay market is not homogenous and is divided along numerous lines including, gender, sexual preference and lifestyle tastes, for example.

By employing the relatively ambiguous umbrella term 'gay' to create the place-image, the managers could attract the attention of a range of different individuals and groups that have some association with the signifier. When this is considered alongside the relative geographical isolation of the venue, this drew together a wide range of consumers. There were few venues in the area that catered for the 'gay market' and the *Freelands* stood in a strong position to fill this gap. Of course, the lack of market visibility of the bar meant people were also likely to go to more established places, or even areas, which had numerous places. However, the key point is that relying on the 'gay market' meant excluding a range of people who may have felt uncomfortable with this place-image. As such, running a 'gay bar' simultaneously represented a potential competitive advantage and disadvantage.

An additional point concerning the place-image concerns the physical attributes of the bar. For some, particularly for older customers, the traditional pub look was a positive aspect of the place-image. Designer London venues were often 'too impersonal' and their modernity was deemed 'unfriendly' or 'unwelcoming'. For younger clientele, the traditional look of the bar was 'dark' and 'dingy', and a distinctly negative quality. The problem for management was that although the bar had more young customers who disliked the decorations, the older customers tended to be more consistent and regular.

A compromise was reached when Steve and Marcus went on a three-weekend amphetamine binge with several pots of paint. They ripped out the dilapidated fixed furniture and painted the walls in a number of different pastel shades. It was a distinctly

low budget solution and many people (young and old) did not like the changes, although they all agreed the bar needed some improvement.

The biggest asset of the bar was the garden. As I mentioned above, the owners seemed to invest most of the money in the garden although it was an underused resource. We had gas heaters and a sheltered area, which was useful on rainy summer evenings. The regulars made use of the garden although its potential was somewhat limited by the weather and because the neighbours complained about the noise. Four large trees that helped to reduce the noise were cut down following a misunderstanding. That, and an unfortunate 'over-the-fence hosing incident', meant our relations with the immediate neighbour were strained. This meant the French windows had to be closed during evening parties and noise had to be kept to minimum in order to avoid official complaint.

It is obvious to conclude the bar was at a disadvantage in terms of labour resources, entertainment, advertising and marketing investment. The bar had low market-visibility in both the town, and in relation to other gay venues. Furthermore, this lack of investment also extended to added extras such as pool tables or drink promotions. In this sense, the bar was disadvantaged in relation to many other bars in the area. However, what the *Freelands* did have was a relatively consistent customer base; people who were drawn together by a common cultural theme of sexual dissidence. It is important to recognise this as an important competitive advantage. The clientele provided much of the entertainment for each other and their social interaction was a large part of the consumption experience. Meanwhile, customers provided essential marketing channels as they spread word about the bar and brought in others. Furthermore, customers offered other forms of labour as they took an active role in maintaining the bar. These are all important issues, which are taken up in more detail in subsequent chapters.

The final part of the chapter introduces the second research context: the *Temple*. I will begin with an extract from an account of a visit before offering a more general discussion on both the organisation and the experience. I will then return to the case study in chapter 7.

The Temple

Sunday 11 a.m., North London

I came up from the underground station and walked inside the main station to wait for my friends. Several groups of young people (late teens to late 20s) were already standing around also waiting for friends near the fast food restaurants at one end of the station. Jeans or combat trousers, T-shirts for men and ‘cropped-tops’ for women made up the standard outfit. Shirts were noticeably absent and many of the men were wearing colourful rugby tops. [Women rarely came ‘well-dressed’ in skirts, high-heeled shoes or wearing excessive make up. Women that did come dressed in this way were usually ‘*Temple virgins*’.] Despite the freezing December weather, several men were not wearing coats and stood around seemingly oblivious to the temperature. Most of the men and women were already drinking and holding bags filled with beer cans. Similar casually dressed men and women stood in long queues in front of every cash machine in the station.

By about 11.30 most of the groups had met up and made their way out of the station. The off-license across the road had a queue of people going all the way outside. All I could hear were Australian and New Zealand accents as people crammed inside the small shop to buy cans of lager and cigarettes. Coming back out of the shop, we turned right towards the industrial estates.

As far as I could see, groups of people were walking up both sides of the road in groups of three or more. It seemed like a pilgrimage where the faithful worshippers were walking toward some sacred shrine carrying their ritual sacrifices of beer in flimsy plastic bags.

Turning into the estate complex, we arrived at the end of a 500 strong queue, with more arriving all the time behind us. Most people were working their way through their beers talking to people in front and behind them. Several large security guards were walking up and down the line selling drink tickets [that could then be exchanged for drinks at one of the bars]. Getting to the end of the queue, the drinking got faster as the men and women got rid of their drinks; several large bins next to the queue were overflowing with empty cans.

As we got to the door, we were assertively told to take off our coats and hand them into the cloakroom before being ushered upstairs to pay the £6 entrance fee. As we came up the stairs, we were hit by the overpowering stagnant aroma of fried meat and onions that had impregnated every inch of the room. Despite the early hour, people were already queuing up to buy the dubious looking hot-dogs and hamburgers.

We made our way through some doors and into a large, hot and crowded space where over a thousand people were crammed in tightly. The floor was covered by sawdust and the only other notable decorations were the national flags of Australia, New Zealand, Ireland and South Africa, hung at the back of the stage, and a large sign that read '*Temple*' above the stage.

The crowd was about 70 percent male, 95 percent Caucasian, and at a guess, 98 percent of the people were under 35. The majority of the people seemed to be in their 20s. Groups of people were dancing around with men and

women mingling in the crowd. On this day, as always, there were several groups of men from rugby teams wearing their team's colours. One group of men were dressed in 70's outfits wearing wigs, false moustaches and sunglasses, while two other men were wearing Santa Claus outfits. I even saw several men wearing tuxedos who looked like they had been to a party the night before and came straight here afterwards. [...]

Because of its unique character, it is difficult to disguise the identity of the venue. The *Temple* was started in 1979 by a group of Australians and New Zealanders who wanted meet regularly; so historically, the essence of the *Temple* already drew on 'myths of commonality' and the neo-tribal sense of identification. Since then, the *Temple* has moved around a number of venues in London, but has been taking place in a large warehouse complex for the last few years. It is currently run as part of the *Rambler Pub Chain*, which targets the traveller market and antipodeans in particular.

The *Temple's* organisers drew heavily on popularised representations of Australian popular culture⁴; stereotypes frequently employed by breweries in selling Australian lagers. In one advert for *Fosters* lager, a 'fueng shui' expert comes to rearrange a house for a client. The result is an empty room with a television, a sofa and a toilet next to a fridge full of lager. In another advert, a robot cleaner is left alone to clean the flat. When the owner returns, he finds the robot in bed drinking lager and performing sexual acts with a vacuum cleaner and a microwave. These myths of Australian popular culture (i.e., lower class, male-oriented, hetero-centric and set around drinking) were purposefully employed in the creation of the place-image and myths surrounding the *Temple*. Just as in the *Freelands*, 'externally located' myths became mobilised and spatialised within the hospitality space.

The *Temple* was only open on Sundays between 12pm until 4pm. This already implied an outsideness of normal leisure time, which reinforced the liminal status of the experience. Furthermore, the temporal compression of the experience, lasting for only four hours, emphasised acceleration. The scarcity of time required the guests to consume every part of the experience more intensely: faster drinking, faster courting rituals and faster relationships. I once saw a man walk up to a girl, put his arm around her, and try to kiss her. When she resisted, he moved on to another girl a few metres away and try the same routine. When she resisted he walked off and tried it with a third girl. The formation of relationships for this man was more of a 'probability-game' as opposed to a delicate courtship.

After the *Temple*, guests were encouraged to move to the *Rambler* pub over the road. For a £3 cover charge, guests continued to engage in drinking games, including a barber's chair where participants were fed alcohol through a funnel and plastic pipe. There were other *Rambler* pubs around London, and following the *Temple*, customers often went on to these places if they did not go over the road. The *Temple* and the bars acted as a reverse feeder system. Feeder bars are venues where discount tokens or flyers are handed out for nightclubs, so that businesses mutually benefit from the same consumers. Usually several bars serve one nightclub. In the case of the *Temple*, this worked reciprocally as one 'club' served multiple bars.

Nevertheless, the *Rambler* pubs worked simultaneously to reproduce the 'myths of collectivity', and to some extent, the 'myths of play' employed in the *Temple*. The drinking sessions in the *Rambler* after the *Temple* certainly perpetuated the atmosphere and the moral climate of the *Temple*. Other *Rambler* pubs and branded pubs such as *Walkabout* similarly employ notions of commonality, although their versions of the myths of play are milder. As with the case of the *Freelands*, the *Temple* was one point in a constellation of hospitality ecologies that reproduced similar versions of the same

sets of myths. Within the *Freelands* and similar spaces, the emphasis was on commonality drawn from sexual dissidence and same sex relationships. Meanwhile, for the *Temple* and other venues, it was drawn, to some extent at least, from a sense of common regional or national identity and heterosexual relationships.

The organisation of experience

Drinks were purchased with the tickets sold by certain security staff and no money was exchanged between customers and the bar-staff. Drinks could not be bought individually and a £7 ticket bought three drinks, which were sold in clear plastic bags. The choice of drinks was simple: two kinds of lager, one cider and a bitter were sold in cans only; alcoholic lemonade was poured from the glass bottles and served in plastic cups, but this was replaced over time by a choice of 'alco-pops' sold in cans. Interestingly, plastic bottles of mineral water and cans of soft drinks were free, although this was not made clear and I saw people take soft drinks as part of their three drinks instead of receiving them as 'extras'.

The *Temple* had a set musical repertoire, which was repeated every week. All the music was rock oriented and electronic dance music was noticeably absent. Australian groups like *INXS* and *Midnight Oil* always received a cheer and people knew the words to most of the songs. When the Australian anthem was played, half the room cheered and started to sing, while the other half booed loudly.

The *Temple* was hosted by a compère with different men performing the role every week on rotation. There were a number of weekly acts and a set of ritual games played every week. The female striptease performer was a weekly feature and male strippers also appeared regularly. Other acts on rotation included a man who swallowed snooker balls and goldfish, and then regurgitated the objects in a specific order.

One of the rituals was the 'boat race': a drinking game where teams of four competed to see who could drink lager quickest. Another regular feature was a competition to see who would do the most outrageous thing on stage. This usually involved stripping, or some self-exposure, but there were stories of people performing sexual acts. The prize was usually a trip to Ireland or around £300. The other regular practice was at the end, when women from the audience danced on stage and stripped for the eager crowd.

The participants in these games and rituals usually received a complimentary T-shirt for their efforts. The company prints a range of promotional T-shirts, which were also available for purchase. These T-shirts had slogans such as 'Drink till she's beautiful' or 'Can you hold my beer while I snog your friend' and I often saw one or two people in the crowd wearing them. I was told the *Temple* very rarely advertised and relied on word of mouth and these t-shirts for promotion.

There were a number of set rules and not throwing cans was one all the compères emphasised every week. Other important rules were that people could not climb on to other people's shoulders, and people could not pick up or lift others. Anyone breaking these rules was either cautioned by the security men or thrown out.

Huge security men were stationed all around the venue. Several stood on the stage to stop people from getting up during the acts; six others stood on raised platforms at the sides and the corners watching the crowd. Throwing cans, excessively rowdy behaviour, urinating anywhere other than the toilets were grounds for immediate expulsion. However, people could usually pay to get back in.

The security men were mostly friendly and encouraged everyone to drink and have a good time. However, people stepping out of line were dealt with severely. I saw a man get slapped about and thrown down the stairs for trying to smuggle out a can of beer after closing time. On the *Temple's* website, there were several postings about inappropriate conduct of security staff. Someone even posted an e-mail address for

people beaten up by the *Temple's* bouncers. The posting claimed the bouncers usually threatened people with physical violence if they complained but encouraged people to lodge formal complaints.

These mechanisms of control extend to other areas of the organisation. The strict division of labour is important to note. Because money was only exchanged between a few allocated members of the security staff and customers, the service encounter was cut down in time and complexity. There was little opportunity for pleasantries and friendly exchanges, especially during the busier periods. Issues of training, personality and service skills were rendered irrelevant. Efficiency was guaranteed through Taylor-esque management techniques of deskilling and task allocation. All this meant management could exercise more power; as opposed to the service staff, who were easily replaceable.

Simultaneously, these control mechanisms cut down the opportunities for fiddling. The service staff worked alongside the security staff and were open to surveillance. Handing out extra drinks or giving away a bag of drinks without a ticket remained a risky business and people could easily be caught. Therefore, the service staff had limited opportunities for fiddling. Security men selling tickets had a greater opportunity to earn extra money. They were free to move around the venue to avoid surveillance by colleagues, who represented the principal forms of control. The other area that offered opportunities for fiddling was the cloakroom. Charging for extra items of clothing but hanging them on the same hanger could allow staff to charge extra and still account for the correct number of tickets.

Conclusion

In some respects, the *Freelands* and the *Temple* appear to be contrasting social spaces. Their social orders reflect opposing ideologies, particularly concerning sexuality. Nevertheless, universal themes of familiarity, continuity and distinction are evident in both cases. Discourses of sexuality, nationality, and even morality, were obviously not created within these venues but were mobilised and spatialised in their recreation. These notions of familiarity and continuity should not simply be seen as the theming of hospitably space. These were clear reflections of the collapse between cultural knowledge, identification and the production and consumption of hospitality space.

Contrastingly, the notion of distinctness was also evident in the way cultural knowledge was spatialised in order to create a community, where there was not one before. This was about the geographical articulation of commonality in marginal spaces. Ecologies of hospitality connected to a broader universe, and parochial social orders existing in contrast to dominant public social orders. This begins to reflect how the ecological framework can be used to connect the experience of hospitality with broader social and political forces.

Having identified and introduced the research contexts, the next chapter considers the methodologies that were used. The discussion begins by clarifying some of the general ethical debates and the strategies and tactics of the research. These issues are then contextualised in considering the fieldwork experiences within the *Freelands*.

Notes

¹ With the exception of *Piaf*, all the names of the people and places are pseudonyms.

² I have used inverted commas with the word 'socially' as I was always conscious of my ethnographic voyeurism during the visits to bars, restaurants and nightclubs.

³ The term village should not be confused with the gay villages of Soho or Manchester, which are large commercial districts with a high concentration of businesses catering for a lesbian and gay clientele.

⁴ See Fiske et al (1987) *Myths of Oz: Reading Popular Culture*, Winchester, MA: Allen and Unwin for a fuller discussion on this, especially pages 1-25 on 'the pub'.

Chapter 4 Methodology

A biographical note

Our individual biographies clearly influence both the topic of the research and the way it is conducted (Lofland and Lofland 1995). I have included this biographical note to help understand the relationships between the people of the study and myself.

I was born in Hungary and lived in Budapest for ten years before moving to the United Kingdom. I continue to speak Hungarian and maintain a link with my heritage while living in England. When people ask what nationality I am, my only response can be: 'both and neither.' I have an emotional attachment to both cultures although I do not feel particular loyalty to either. Just as Powdermaker (1966) recognised, I am conscious of my position as a simultaneous insider and outsider in culture. Specific situations may bring me closer toward either one, and therefore distanced from the other, although the duality means I never cease to be either. Identification and social position is therefore largely dependent on the context and a sense of social proximity between individuals and networks of people around me. This inherent ambiguity sets the tone for my fieldwork.

In a social context where notions of community and groups were inherently problematic, the challenge was to account for the way networks of people negotiated their proximity relationships. Consequently, just as I sought to explain the basis for connection or disconnection among others, I have sought to examine reflexively how my position changed within specific situations, and among certain configurations of people.

The ethics of ambiguity and the ambiguity of ethics

The nature of the study raised a series of important ethical issues concerning the ambiguity of the field setting, my position in the field, and the nature of relations during the fieldwork. Consequently, it is essential that I address these issues from the very beginning.

Most ethnographic studies involve the negotiation of ambiguities and moral quagmires in field relationships. During my research, I often perpetuated and exploited ambiguities in field settings to broaden the range and depth of the data. I attempted to tease information from field encounters by asking seemingly innocent or indirect questions while obscuring my motives. This, however, raised some critical issues concerning the power relationship between the researcher and the researched.

Following Fine's 'exposé' (1993) on the problems of ethnographic research, my aim is to confront the problems of fieldwork in order to explain how and why I often employed questionable strategies and tactics. My aim is to demonstrate that the ethical aspects of my research were considered in a dialogic and reflexive way, which tried to understand the complexity of the practicalities of fieldwork. All too often, ethical debates, especially those concerning the overtness of social research are reactionary and monologic, often referring to the same extreme cases (Humphreys 1970, Festinger et al 1956 etc.), which do not help to negotiate practical problems (Bok 1986, Erikson 1967, Herrera 1999, Warwick 1982). Didacticism may offer useful signposts, but practical cases are more helpful in understanding the complexities and ambiguities of power relationships in fieldwork situations (see Punch 1986, 1994 or Mitchell 1991 for example).

The ambiguities of the field

To see is to share, to look is to take, to watch is to steal...

The problem is not so much the action, but the intention. The difficulty in my research was the effective collapse of the work/leisure dichotomy. It was often difficult to separate the moments when I assumed the role of ethnographer and when I resumed being the 'civilian'. Consciousness of the social and physical surroundings is obviously an essential quality for an ethnographer (Fetterman 1991). More importantly, this is not abandoned when one steps out of the fieldwork context: *this sense of awareness becomes instinctive* (Roth 1962: 284).¹ The ethical issue became prominent when what I saw, what I essentially experienced, was crystallised in academic discourse. The people who originally created social phenomena, no longer had control over the representations of their own lives. Their actions, and the meanings of their actions, ceased to be their exclusive property.

The issue is one of consensual sharing where I take something that was not formally given to me. However, as I said above, it is not so much the action but the intention that is ethically problematic. I see and hear events everyday, but it is only when I seek to interpret them (especially in a formal scientific context) that they are transformed into inviolable property. The experience is somehow elevated in status and worth as it is objectified.

More often than not, the criticism of taking without consent could not be refuted. During my visits to hospitality venues, I frequently appropriated idle gossip, conversations, comments and reactions. In many situations, a person who said a few words to me frequently offered more in that insignificant (momentary) encounter than I would have got if I stopped them, explained my position, and asked them their opinion.

For example, in one incident two people were dancing around the *Freelands*; they were being loud and drawing considerable attention from others. Another [older] patron said the words 'bloody queens' as a passing comment to some of the others and me in the bar. Such a seemingly insignificant encounter helped me understand how that person classified other people, and indicated the basis on which this classification was made. Furthermore, this statement positioned the speaker in relation to these 'others' on a social map. In these situations, stopping the person to explain who I was, what I intended to do, and then asking for his or her opinion of people's behaviour seemed unreasonable. Moreover, because these were publicly 'broadcast' declarations, these did not necessarily warrant elaborate clarification of my reception or potential interpretation.

True, most of the people who I saw and heard did not consent to share their experiences. However, the arguments concerning the practicalities of informing people in large public spaces is well worn, as are the arguments about gaining consent from people with whom you share a momentary and distant encounter (Dingwall 1980, Punch 1986 esp. p36, Roth 1962).

At first glance, it appeared that the more public the social space was, the less problematic my ethical position became (Bulmer 1982, Thorne 1980). However, as in any other commercial hospitality venue, as the patronage changed, so did the social order and the potential meanings of space (Lofland, L. 1989). A supposedly public democratic space could easily be occupied and monopolised, turning it into private space. Throughout my time as a consumer, and researcher, I was very conscious of the social character of space in terms of ownership. This raised some critical issues concerning the social nature of space.

The ambiguities of group and space

Whose space was I in, or more precisely, whose space was I outside and attempting to enter? Was there a group as such or merely shifting networks of loosely connected individuals who temporarily occupied space? It is easy to argue that if I felt the need to obscure aspects of my identity there were groups I sought to penetrate, often covertly.

With a consistent and easily definable social entity, it is easier to approach 'the group' overtly; by establishing relationships with appropriate gatekeepers, one can seek to gain entry through the slow development of trust. My research started from the space outwards, a space that could not be clearly defined as private or parochial, open or enclavic. As I found out about the *Freelands*, even terms like gay were problematic.

Who were the effective subjects of my study? If there was no coherent group, then whose permission should I have sought to gain, or more specifically, who were the effective gatekeepers? Naturally, there were the managers of the bar. It was necessary, at least initially, to have their approval, which I received surprisingly easily in the *Freelands*. The problem was that there was no consistent social entity. This meant I was taking up relationships with specific individuals and shifting networks of people, each encounter bringing with it certain possibilities and tensions.

Within the *Freelands*, I was a straight, male researcher among predominantly gay clientele, which was in addition to my own personal idiosyncrasies, my class background, education and national identity. All these things meant I often felt distanced from certain individuals and groups. By being conscious of my position, from an ethical perspective, I was acutely aware of when and how space was being privatised. Sometimes I found myself outside, and sometimes inside.

Certain key informants, who knew about my work, often made my position clear. One of my key informants Dave frequently called me over and said: 'listen to this, you'll

probably find this useful for your book.’ before sharing some gossip. At other times, as the diary extract below illustrates, they shut me out precisely because they knew about my work.

Dave was talking to two people at the right hand side of the bar. I thought I heard someone call me from that direction and looked up at them. Dave looked at me and said: “oi, nosey! That got your attention [referring to their conversation]; I bet that’s going in your little book.” I wasn’t even listening to them.

Brewer (2000), Bulmer (1982), Gold (1958), Junker (1960), Mitchell (1991) have set out the possible roles of the researcher. Simultaneously, most ethnographers acknowledge that situations change and roles shift during the fieldwork (Adler, P. A. 1993, Adler, P. A. and Adler, P. 1987, 1991, Olesen and Whittaker 1967). I would go even further. I understand the relationship between myself those around me as existing in a continually shifting dialogic. The social proximity between us is always renegotiated, according to our social history and the immediate situation. Again, critically questioning my position in relation to specific networks of people helped me understand how ecologies of hospitality were produced and consumed in the particular location. This is not to justify unethical research on grounds of better quality data; this is an acknowledgement of the ambiguities of the research context and accounting for how these ambiguities were negotiated.

Confrontational and incremental engagement

It is difficult to articulate one's motivations in terms of the ethnographic project. Not everyone will understand and not everyone will want to understand (Shaffir 1991: 78-79, Mitchell 1993). Obviously, some may contribute openly, although, many will not. The encounters in bars were often very brief which made it difficult to build rapport. Understandably, the opening phrase: 'hi, I am doing some research' was often not very well received. Just as many other neophyte ethnographers, in the beginning of my research I often tried to explain my study to people before asking them questions.² This usually resulted in dismissive looks and unhelpful responses. This did not mean I stopped explaining my work altogether, although I came to hone my explanations.

It is difficult to outline types of people, or types of social contexts where the relationships remained atomic and where they progressed. Each encounter brought with it certain opportunities and tensions. The only things that became increasingly repeated were the strategies and tactics I used to negotiate the encounters.

The communication of my research intent occurred in two ways. The first was the 'confrontational' approach. To be unexpectedly approached by a researcher and asked a series of questions can be likened to stepping under a cold shower; the natural instinct is to step away to avoid the discomfort, it is a normal reaction to a confrontational situation.

Not everyone reacted negatively, but when this was the outcome of an encounter, there was little room for negotiation, and certainly no chance to start again. Sometimes I pounced on people quite opportunistically, mostly either because they were on their own or, if they were part of a boisterous and friendly looking group. However, as I explain in more detail below, how people perceived my social status and motivations was a critical factor. If I was perceived to be part of the 'social scenery', and therefore a

non-threatening presence, it was easier for me to gain people's confidence. It is self-evident that initial perceptions of me played an important part in gaining further support from people.

Alternatively, to establish some kind of rapport, which is then developed into a research relationship, is more like getting into a hot bath. This can be called the 'incremental' approach. Similar to Pryce (1986)³, I often neglected to highlight my research intentions, not so much to deceive, but to establish and build rapport. I then mentioned my work casually in conversations. People were slowly eased into the hot water and given time to adjust, and even withdraw if the situation became too intense or uncomfortable. The interaction was longitudinal and a mutual understanding of our roles and obligations developed over time (Olesen and Whittaker 1967). Throughout my research, I tried both variations depending on the situation and my courage at the time. However, I tended to stick to the incremental approach.

It is natural to argue that from an ethical perspective, this approach of building rapport and then revealing my research interests was fundamentally flawed. First, it meant the relationship was built on some level of deception. Furthermore, it is reasonable to conclude that people may have been upset that I started up a seemingly innocent dialogue for ulterior motives. This is a common problem for ethnographers⁴, and I must concede, this potential duality in motivation did become a source of emotional tension. It meant that despite some of these developing into genuine friendships, there was an element of insincerity in the beginning.

I also concede this could have been perceived negatively, but this did not depend on people's perceptions alone. This also concerned my ability to articulate my research intentions in an appropriate way, at the right opportunity. The challenge was to provide an appropriate explanation, like a 'sales pitch' (Gans 1968: 310). The aim was to arouse interest and encourage the individual to participate, whether by offering some passing

comment or a lengthy discourse. It was a matter of taking something potentially alien to the non-scientific participant, and letting them perceive it as a constructive project to take part in, even if they did not clearly understand the nature and purpose of my research.

I often took the emphasis off specific people, which implied 'watching'. Alternatively, I encouraged others to 'look' and 'see' with me, as a contributor, in a non-threatening sense. The pressure of the scientific gaze was dispersed; it was not focused on the individual but shifted, semantically, to the general. Furthermore, when discussing my work, I often mentioned existing contributors in order to persuade others to participate; allowing people to see me openly discussing my research with others helped make my work seem more broadly accepted as a legitimate enterprise.

Admittedly, I consciously influenced people's perceptions by emphasising that others contributed to this openly. Being self-critical, I exploited ambiguity by implying that I was writing about a range of people and not simply focusing on any one individual. By shifting the spotlight from them, on to what was all around them, this revealed their own position.

The longer and more intensive the interaction, the more useful it often became to be increasingly overt and open about my work, at least with some people. It was at these times that language played an important role in mediating roles and establishing relationships. Shaffir (1991: 78) for example, often dropped the references to 'sociology' from his initial introductions and explanations of his work. In a similar way, I often used softer terms such as 'writing' as opposed to 'researching', which has strong connotations. The term 'researching' emphasises a separation between researcher and researched (as the object of research). Conversely, the term writing, because of its ambiguity, implying creativity and expression, is not automatically associated with such

specific role distinctions. I often asked people to 'put their voices to the piece', to contribute to the creative process, as opposed to being questioned about their opinions. Sometimes people came back saying: 'so, you are doing some research. You are studying us! Why?' Even here I took the emphasis off the specific, and placed it onto the general. I often told people my research was not about this one place in particular, but about a range of places. Again, this was not altogether a lie, despite the fact that I did pay close attention to this space, and its consumers. As the relationship developed, there was the opportunity to offer a more elaborate 'ethnographic explanation' that clarified my work (Spradley 1979).

Naturally, who we are perceived to be in the field is only partly dependent on who we think we are and how we project our own sense of identity (see Mitchell 1991: 101, Whyte 1966: 300). People distorted the nature of my work, which often felt uncomfortable. However, this became another means of understanding the social relationships inside the place. For example, Dave continually referred to my work as psychoanalysis. Other people then approached me using this term to define my research. This inadvertently revealed some of the social networks and connections, while arousing curiosity in people. I tried to offer clearer explanations of my research, as the situations allowed, but people still made assumptions based on their own perceptions. I admit my initial ambiguity may have contributed to these misunderstandings, but these perceptions often depended on whose interpretation of my work (and me) they encountered. Because of the wide range of people I encountered, I could not offer an extensive explanation to everyone. With those that were prepared to listen, I could be more expressive, while having to abridge my work for less receptive listeners.

When one of my informants, Damien, read an earlier draft of the thesis, he said many people he had talked with assumed my work was about gay lives; an interpretation of my work he felt I perpetuated. However, as I explained to Damien, the specific focus of

the study shifted throughout the fieldwork, which meant explanations of my work that were appropriate at one point were not necessarily appropriate later. For example, when I began to appreciate the marginal status of women, especially lesbians, I often emphasised the sociological aspects of my research as opposed to the operational when asking them to participate. Moreover, I emphasised the dominance of male perspectives in my study as a way to encourage them to contribute. I explained that my research examined the relationship between hospitality and identities, but their participation inevitably became a political act as they sought to represent their interests; and their contribution was to an academic enterprise as opposed to a business study.

It is possible to argue that this was deception; I consciously blurred and obscured details as I translated, interpreted and reconstructed my roles as researcher, and participant, according to the encounter. I concede that deception, as a philosophical construct, is not just a matter of untrue statements but is also about what is unsaid: misdirection, obfuscation and 'interpretations-of-convenience' (Bok 1980). However, in this case, these specific articulations of my role were part of a conscious construction of a shared social reality where we could both engage with each other empathetically.

As opposed to simply calling it an outright act of deception, I take this to be a salient characteristic of society. Culture, in a dialogic sense, exists in this hybridised space; it is simultaneously what is shared, and what is individual (Bakhtin 1981, Vološinov 1986). My version of reality was articulated in respect to other people's versions. It abandoned the linguistic markers that were inappropriate in that social milieu in favour of more appropriate ones. It was imprecise and partial, as is any other version of social reality. It is a process of negotiation as opposed to a structured set of roles or fixed social positions. This negotiation is characterised by constant translation and reconstruction as certain 'centripetal' forces pull towards unification of meaning while other 'centrifugal' forces pull towards idiosyncrasy and diversity.

Nevertheless, there were numerous encounters initiated primarily for research purposes that continued to exist as informal relationships. These relationships without overt reference to the work, and therefore consent, posed significant ethical problems. In these situations I often had to consider what the nature of the relationship was (whether public civility or private trust), and the nature of the conversation at the time (in terms of its sensitivity). I often perpetuated these encounters, partly to not offend the others with whom I was having the conversation, but also to pursue my own research goals. Sometimes, I retreated to some moral high ground by articulating my potential intentions more appropriately. For example, I often asked people if I could quote them when they made particularly important comments. This usually led to some explanation of my work and acted as an improvised way to approach the problem of consent. Sometimes I could use this to transform the encounter into a research relationship, but I often did not.

I clearly remember the first night I met Mike. He was a very 'straight-acting' married man who occasionally came into the bar:

A man came in around 8, early to mid 30s, short receding dark brown hair, black leather jacket, shirt and jeans. He looked like he'd had a few already. [...] I'd never seen him before and he did not seem like the sociable type. He sat at the bar alone drinking *Stella* and smoking. He just stared into empty space. I was really nervous, but I really wanted to find out who he was and what he was doing here. In the most nonchalant way, I walked around cleaning the bar and casually mentioned that I had never seen him before. He said he did not come here very often as the last time he came people got a 'bit funny' with him. I asked what he meant but he seemed reluctant to tell me about it. I asked him as innocently as possible how he

came to be here. He said he used to come here before [it turned gay], and when he read about it he came in again. He said he was: 'surprised at how ordinary it was.' I felt the ice was breaking and asked if he went anywhere else. His response was blunt: "I am not gay!" When I told him that I was not gay either, he seemed to relax a lot more. [...] [During the next 15 minutes, he talked about his past encounters, sexual preferences, his homophobic social background, and about his views on bisexuality.]

Within a very short period, he told me about his job as a baker as well as some deeply personal issues concerning his identity crisis. Whenever he talked about his own sexual experiences, he lowered his voice and looked around. Even here, he was so conscious about what he was saying. I felt terrible because at every opportunity, I went out the back to make notes.

The role conflict was very stressful; he saw me as a confidant and I blatantly exploited that. I considered telling him about my work but I did not see how he could understand what I was doing. His dissident sexual identity was intensely suppressed, and contributing to my work could have potentially exposed him.

I tested his attitude in the coming months to see if it would be reasonable to approach him overtly. I consciously talked to others about books, and about how my work was progressing, so he could hear us. He did not understand, or seem to want to understand. In general, he was dismissive about these sorts of conversations. The tensions of his sexual identity and the class difference between us meant a research relationship seemed untenable. Despite this, we regularly talked about relationships, holidays, family and the pub. In certain situations, we were in close proximity, although some divides remained unbridgeable.

After much deliberation, I eventually told Mike about my work, and that I had written about him. He was unsure what to make of it at first, but after I explained my work in detail, he seemed quite positive about it. It certainly felt good to be honest with him.

Access, ethics and the prisoner's dilemma

The problems of openness, and the processes of exposure, were particularly important when considering access to the social space itself. I considered gaining employment at a number of venues in order to gain appropriate access. This meant that I not only had to negotiate an offer of employment, but I also needed to consider carefully how I would articulate my research intentions.

Similarly to Tucker's 'two-person dilemma' theory (1950/2001), I considered the options open to me. I could have been very open and risked being shut out without any information. Alternatively, I could have maintained some subterfuge, by either declaring my intention after an appropriate relationship had been established. Then again, I could have maintained my silence indefinitely. All the options involved some level of compromise, either ethically, or in terms of the access and the potential quality of data.

Initially, the venues I considered were located in central London and I expected to have to engage in emotionally stressful negotiations with the owners over access. However, in the end, through considerable serendipity, I received a job offer at the *Freelands* without complicated manoeuvrings (see chapter 3). This largely determined the nature and direction of my research. Receiving this opportunity acted as a funnelling process by encouraging me to spend time in this one venue. After working at the bar for a few weeks, I made a conscious choice of pursuing my research aims and declared my

intentions as best I could to the managers. They gave their approval and from then on, I was often introduced as the person: 'writing a book about us.'

I worked at the bar for over 27 months, working nearly every night for the first few months, and working one or two nights by the end. In addition, I came to the bar once or twice during the days and on my nights off. Having got to know some of the customers, I also participated in a number of social events with people outside the bar. We went to other gay and straight bars and clubs in the area, and in London. I went to house parties and birthday parties of some of the regular clients. One of the managers even took me on a tour of cruising areas on one of the first nights I worked there. Steve loved amphetamines and when he could not sleep, he often drove around instead of sitting in the pub. He was a great source of information, especially about the owners.

The question of whether this reflects a calculative and underhand approach remains. I cannot deny that it does, and it is a strategy some might find 'morally obnoxious' (Shils 1982: 132). There was an element of insincerity in my enthusiasm for accepting the position. However, I must re-emphasise that I had been to the bar as a consumer on numerous occasions and found the place appealing, in both the social and sociological sense. I was not a consumer or an employee just because I was a researcher, although I cannot deny that the potentials of gaining inside information did appeal. In a similar way, meeting people outside of the *Freelands* were sincerely social activities, despite the fact that I often made subsequent notes in one of my diaries.

I think this is what Geertz meant when he talked about the researcher being simultaneously analytical and engaged (1968: 157). It is an inherent duality in self, where the researcher is stimulated as social participant and as would-be ethnographer. Maybe the charge I should answer for is excessive sympathy for the research environment, a criticism concerning objectivity and validity. However, this too would be a simplistic interpretation of events; finding a social environment interesting does not

stop it being 'anthropologically strange'. Similarly, treating a social setting as anthropologically strange, and subjecting it to the ethnographic gaze, does not mean that all the relationships encountered within are going to be cynical and calculated.

Methods in practice

Within the next section, I intend to concentrate on specific stages of my research and the methods that I employed. My principal method was participant observation, which paved the way for a series of recorded in-depth interviews. Some of the interviews were conducted on a one-on-one basis although others were informal focus groups, involving up to six people at a time. The implications of these interviews are discussed in the latter part of this chapter.

Drawing on specific observations, my sample was essentially a mix of purposive, opportunistic and snowball techniques. I will offer different examples of these sampling techniques below.

Within a few weeks of working at the bar, the status of certain regulars became clear. For example, the bar had relatively few regular female guests and I knew I had to secure interviews with six key women. However, I did not approach the regulars first. In fact, my very first interview was with a more peripheral guest, a young man named Paul. Following an informal conversation about my work, I asked Paul whether he would like to sit down with me and tell me what he thought about the bar, the people, and other places. This interview was useful in terms of getting to know his perceptions of the groups and cliques. More importantly, this first interview helped to give me confidence in asking others.

Just like in Brenda Mann's study of 'Brady's bar', word of my research reached most of the regular clientele through 'bar talk' (Spradley and Mann 1975, Mann 1976), as the following diary extract illustrates:

I came in just before 6 to start work. Dave was sitting at the bar with Ritchie and Joe. Dave turned to them and said: "do you know he is doing a psychology study on us? We are the subjects." I was really embarrassed and tried to play it down by saying: "it's not psychology, it's more about people and the sort of places they go to." [...] Later Dave called me over, and in a lowered voice said: 'it was very interesting.' He was interested in psychology and thought about being a psychologist at one point in his life.

Dave found out about my work after he had a speculative conversation with Steve about why I was there. He said he would like to know more about my work and I asked him if he wanted to sit down and tell me his opinions. From then on, I regularly talked about my work openly with him in the bar, and I was often able to turn to others and ask if they wanted to contribute. Dave went on to become one of my key informants.

My other key informant was Daniel, whom I often saw among large groups of people. More importantly, in my notes on groups and cliques, he often featured in different configurations of people. He seemed to know many people, and many people knew him, or of him.

I approached Daniel more directly on a Friday night as a large group of people stayed for a lock-in. I gave him a more rigorous description of my work and asked if he also wanted to contribute. He seemed genuinely interested and agreed to help.

Daniel was well educated and had even considered studying for a Ph.D. in science some years earlier. He was a civil servant in his early 30s who lived just around the corner

from the *Freelands* with his boyfriend Warren, and, had been going there since practically the first day the bar opened. Daniel had a busy social life: he sang in a male choir and patronised many different places in and around London. He was a regular customer and an 'active guest', often helping at the bar. Daniel even set up a web site for the *Freelands* and posted photographs on the site following parties. We met up on many occasions and went to places in London with his friends.

Dave was also in his 30s and ran his own building maintenance business for while. When his business folded, he went to work as a bus driver. Dave could drink incredible amounts of vodka and obtain of a vast array of legal and illegal substances. He was the sort of person who could get false MOTs, get mobile phones reset and was always prepared to share some hair-raising revelation. In other words, Dave was a well-connected, but open-minded deviant.

Both Dave and Daniel were well connected socially, experienced on the gay scene, and both knew a great deal about the bar's history. More importantly, they offered different perspectives on both the *Freelands* and gay cultures. Dave represented a different class upbringing to Daniel although he was just as receptive. Dave also had a very different take on life at the pub to Daniel; where Daniel came and drank in the evenings with his friends, Dave often drank there during the day on his own. He knew the owners of the bar, as well as the managers. Consequently, he was always up with the latest gossip and told me a great deal about the bar's owners (who I could not access directly). He had experience of the seedier side of gay life, and a lot more knowledge of marginal social geographies.

Working at the Freelands

The *Freelands* was relatively easy to work in and did not have the same rigid service standards as other bars (see chapter 3). This offered more opportunities to speak to people and take notes. The layout of the bar meant I could often go ‘out the back’ and write notes as soon as things happened. I developed a shorthand technique where people were given nicknames, usually according to some physical characteristic, drink or behavioural marker. This allowed me to take notes about situations and encounters, which were elaborated later. As with most ethnographies, this usually meant writing up the events of parties and evenings at work during the early hours of the morning.

My initial notes mainly concerned how people found out about the *Freelands*, when they first went there, how often they came, and whom they came with. Additionally, I paid particular attention to specific people and their connections to each other. I noted who engaged with whom, what the nature of their encounter or their relationship was, and who avoided each other. This helped to map certain networks of relationships; these in turn informed my conclusions about the nature of social proximity between consumers. After about a month, I also realised that I should consider where they were spatially during encounters. From this point on, I split the bar into zones and noted how people occupied certain areas and how interaction differed in certain zones according to the time, and the people present.

My role as barman gave me access to a range of people. As part of my barman routine, I always asked people how they found out about the place. If they were unfamiliar, I would always say: ‘I have not seen you in here before’, before inquiring about how they came to be there, whether they knew anyone, and what they thought about the place. I asked them if they were from the area, and if not, where they came from. These informal questions often led me to ask where else they went.

Sometimes the use of certain place names offered equally useful responses. Certain bars, pubs or clubs could be used to draw out some reaction, whether negative or positive. This was always a useful starting point in mapping the way people positioned themselves and the values they identified with, or not.

These informal questions were appropriate for a casual service repertoire and often proved to be very informative. One of the women that came to the bar said she did not want to contribute formally to the research, even after I tried to explain my research and mentioned others that had contributed. In the following months, I still managed to find out a lot about her through these conversations. In general, I tried to be subtle with customers, but I still made faux pas:

A man was in tonight sitting at the bar. [...] He looked like he was on something, 'speed' or 'coke'. [...] Marcus came into the bar with Luke [his boyfriend at the time] and sat at the bar next to this man. [...] I don't know what came over me but I said to this man: "what kind of people do you think come to this bar?" very contemplatively. [...] Luke turned to me, and in a kind of cynical 'I know what you're up to' tone of voice asked: "so, how's your book coming along?" I realised how blunt and inappropriate that question must have sounded. I felt really embarrassed and said: "I know, I have difficulty putting my work down."

Throughout my fieldwork, I wrote two research diaries. One was a formal research diary, written in eight volumes, each covering about 4 months. I used this research diary to write accounts of events and build profiles of people. A second diary was more intimate and related to my studies as a whole. The first diary was more descriptive and reflexive, while the second was personal. Visits to other venues were written in separate

files and indexed by venue name. It was interesting to see, that as friendships developed, I stopped writing about our evenings out in the formal research diary, choosing instead to write about them in my personal one.

The research diary was indexed according to a series of keywords using the date, volume, and page number. The 120 or so keywords included the names of people alongside events and themes. Examples of the keywords included: 'arguments', 'brings who', 'class', 'classifying others', 'comments on the bar', 'comments on gay culture', 'comment on places', 'comments on the town', 'connected', 'dancing', 'drinks', 'encounters', 'excluded', 'fiddles', 'heard about/found out', 'isolated', 'management', 'music', 'party', 'trouble'. These allowed me to isolate recurring themes and refer to them easily when writing up.

Obtrusive techniques

In some situations, I assumed a bystander's position, simply observing the social dramas. At other times, I was actively disruptive in order to examine the social culture of the bar. These obtrusive techniques were often useful in testing the basis of social association and organisation (see also Harrington 2002, Schwalbe 1996).

I have already pointed to the questions I asked and the conversations I instigated. My involvement and influence on the social environment is something I continually address throughout the thesis. However, two of the most significant examples involved changing the music and bringing in new people. Again, these are both techniques I return to in later chapters, but I will outline them briefly here.

In addition to the jukebox, another music system was controlled from the behind bar. We were encouraged to play certain genres of music but I deliberately experimented with a range of music in order to judge people's reactions. This demonstrated the

intimate relationship music had with the social order of the bar and its image (see chapter 6). Moreover, people's reaction was indicative of their general tastes and the social discourses they identified with.

The second obtrusive method involved bringing people to the bar, sometimes without telling them what kind of place it was. I did this with nine different people: five men and four women, all under the age of 35. I used these visits to question what, if anything, they noticed about the bar and the patrons. All the male 'participants' were heterosexual, except for one acquaintance (Guy). With the exception of one man (Carlos), I always forewarned the more homophobic ones to avoid any conflict. Afterwards we discussed their feelings and reactions. These techniques presented an indicative sample that allowed me to question people's perceptions of the place, their attitudes, and their knowledge base. This of course reflected their sense of social positioning and (dis)identification with certain aesthetic, cultural or moral values.

Interviews

The issue of what constitutes an 'interview' is debatable. During Powdermaker's (1966) study of Southern American black communities, she referred to lengthy conversations, which she wrote up afterwards in her car as 'interviews'. Given this broad definition, I conducted hundreds of interviews with several hundred people. However, 26 people, (9 female and 17 male) took part in formal recorded interviews. They represented a broad spectrum of consumers including peripheral and regular users, people with different educational and class backgrounds, and disparate attitudes towards sexuality.

Some of these were single interviews but key informants, especially Daniel and Dave, were interviewed repeatedly over two years. I conducted the formal interviews between June 2001 and May 2002, and continually met with my informants over the 27 months.

Working at the *Freelands* meant that by the end of the summer 2001, most people knew of my work and I could use informal encounters to refer to emerging themes without having to organise further long interviews.

Admittedly, the gender bias is problematic, although this highlighted the highly gendered nature of space. The bar was mainly patronised by male clientele and it was difficult to approach women patrons. Women tended to come in couples or small units of three or four, and were less inclined to mingle.

Two of the principal female customers were kind enough to grant me interviews. Joyce and Kerri were both lesbians in their early 30s, and came to the bar regularly. Joyce was another civil servant, and worked at the bar before. She was sacked by a previous manager (see chapter 3), but came back to work again briefly during the time I was there. Kerri was a computer programmer and another regular drinker. She also worked behind the bar for a few months, mainly for her own amusement as opposed to any real financial necessity. Both knew many of the people and had access to a great deal of gossip.

Alongside Kerri and Joyce, I interviewed some of the younger principal lesbian guests: Karen, Nicola and Jenny, who I will introduce in later chapters. All these women were reached through the lengthier 'incremental' approach. We had the opportunity to establish an appropriate relationship over time and they were enthusiastic about contributing. However, because female customers were few in number, and their visits were often ephemeral, I often had to resort to the 'confrontational' approach. The success rate of this was considerable lower.

Four women came in tonight. [...] They were sitting at the back left side of the bar. [...] I eventually plucked up the courage, went up to their table and introduced myself. I explained that I was writing a university paper about

people's experiences of bars and places, and explained that it was difficult to find women to contribute as so few women come here. I asked why they thought that was. [...] I [also] asked about where they went, and where they thought women went in general.

The oldest one _____ was really helpful and they all seemed keen to try to respond. [They told me about a number of places and some of their experiences] [...] I was supposed to be working so I could not spend a long time with them, or take notes. I wrote down their more important responses when I went back behind the bar. [...]

Because I could not really write anything down, I asked them if they would come back and sit down with me on another occasion. I emphasised that I was flexible and could work around their schedules. [...] We agreed to meet the following week and _____ [the older woman] even said she was looking forward to it.

I went to meet them the following week but they never showed up, and apart from one of the women, I never saw them again in the *Freelands*.

In a similar incident, on a busy Saturday night, I approached a group of four older women and asked them if they wanted to participate. Following this meeting, we negotiated for about two months about when we could meet. When we settled on the date, only two of them turned up; nevertheless, I was grateful for their assistance.

Trying to get interviews with straight women presented a different set of problems. On a number of occasions, women misunderstood my motivations, assuming that my research was part of an elaborate courting ritual. For example, I spent one evening talking to Samantha, a friend of one of the regulars, trying to explain what I do for living. When I asked Samantha if she wanted to participate in an interview, she agreed

and offered to give me her phone number. However, when I explained my work in more detail, she was deliberately ironic in saying: “you only want me for my mind.”

The interviews allowed me to ask specific questions and pursue topics that would have been inappropriate during informal interaction. For example, questions about categories of people involved continually returning to the problem of definitions, asking for examples and elaboration that would have been inappropriate in other social contexts. The real usefulness of interviews came when they were interpreted as part of a multi-method approach. When considering interviews alongside broader personality profiles and observations they became a useful method of triangulation.

For example, I heard Darren discuss bisexuals before in a number of conversations, often being very critical and using the term ‘greedy’ to describe their behaviour. However, during a formal interview he said he did not have a problem with people who like boys and girls. The issue for him was that men had the potential to change partners, going from gay to straight and back again. The problem was not with sexual orientation but rejection. He had been involved with a bisexual man previously who ended the relationship and went back to living a heterosexual life. Following this, Darren stopped going out with bisexuals, or was at least wary of entering into a relationship with a bisexual man.

The interviews were usually conducted on a one-on-one basis, although it often proved useful to interview people in couples, threes or even fours. Some people were unsure about what to make of interviews, but their friends or partners were more enthusiastic. Seeing their peers contribute openly and willingly encouraged new people to contribute. This was especially true when I interviewed three friends: Dean, Thomas and Simon. Dean and Thomas were younger and ‘out’; they had no qualms about discussing their social lives and their experiences. Simon on the other hand was in his 30s and still ‘in the closet’ in most areas of his life. When we started the interview, Simon did not even

want to give his name and just said: “we’ll see how in-depth it goes.” After about 15 minutes, Simon began to get more involved, and by the end of the interview, he was contributing as much as the others were. If he had not come with Dean and Nathan, I am not sure if I could even have got him to contribute.

An obvious problem with interviewing in groups was that people, especially friends, potentially influenced the responses of their peers. I was well aware of this problem and treated all their responses cautiously. Nevertheless, people were usually happy to contradict each other, and disagreements between informants were often useful sources of data. As I mentioned before, the real usefulness of the interviews was the way they helped to confirm, or contradict, existing comments and observations.

The issue of space was also equally important. I had a number of requirements concerning where and when the interviews took place. My principal concern was for the contributors. Often some of the topics were very personal and it was important to be in spaces where respondents felt comfortable talking. I intended to record the interviews so my second concern was that the tapes were audible. In the end, we conducted interviews in people’s houses, parks, bars, cafes, beer gardens and even the foyer of the local theatre. We often did interviews in the bar itself, and in the pub’s garden. The managers even let me use the upstairs lounge for one session. I deliberately started the interviews during spring and continued to do them throughout the summer because we could sit in places like parks and pub gardens. They were more public and ‘neutral’ spaces, where we would not be overheard and informants would not feel intimidated.

This supposed neutrality of space is of course questionable. Most public spaces are heterosexual spaces and many gay people do not consider them neutral. I often noted informants lowering their voices and looking around when making certain explicit comments about sexuality; they were instinctively conscious of their dissident status. Neutrality, as I am using it here, is a myth, as people continually engage with material

and discursive space where power relations are constantly reproduced. However, I am using the term neutrality to understand specific power relations between the informants and me (as researcher). For example, if the interviews were conducted in an alien institutional space such as the university, this may have put different pressures on the informant to perform. Questions of power and performance still existed in supposedly 'non-institutional' settings although this gave informants more opportunities to project their influence over the encounter. These kinds of spatial environments also helped to overcome role distinctions between researcher and researched.

I also conducted a series of interviews openly in the bar. Again, this helped others appreciate that everyone could participate in the project. This often encouraged others to contribute. For example, during my first interview with Dave, we were joined by Joe and Ritchie. Joe and Ritchie were rather abrasive and I never thought they would contribute to something like this, possibly because of my own class bias. Within ten minutes, we were joined by three more people, and even the manager joined in and contributed. This reflects the more serendipitous snowball sampling I referred to earlier. The first interviews often took place in the bar, which had a number of benefits. As I mentioned before, it was a place in which respondents felt comfortable, and it allowed me to conduct my research visibly. However, subsequent interviews often took place away from the bar, which had other benefits. This allowed us to discuss the bar and other patrons, often more critically.

The interviews were semi-structured and I prepared a list of questions, most of which are listed in appendix b. In addition to setting out the questions, appendix b also offers a fuller explanation of their usefulness. These represent the basic set of questions, the consistent skeletal framework, I used throughout my research.

Some questions were applicable to everyone while I changed questions according to the informant and the situation. For example, I asked everyone to introduce him or herself

and talk about their first experiences of the bar. However, some questions, about specific incidents for example, were often unique to people.

The usefulness of the skeletal framework within a semi-structured approach was that informants could veer away from the topics as new issues emerged. Dave for example always had a number of stories and anecdotes and it took three sessions to ask my initial set of question with him.

As far as possible, I tried to record the interviews on cassettes, which were painfully transcribed later. However, I made it clear that the recorder was not mandatory and could be turned off at any time. Often some of the best stories and the most biting comments were given when the machine was off.

In addition to the tape recorder, I made notes throughout the interview. I used a crude form of shorthand and noted keywords about their responses on one side of the page. On the other side of the page, I made comments about body language, facial gestures, timing of responses and other things going on around us. I also commented on my body language and noted incidents where I felt I was asking leading questions or influencing their responses with my gestures. When transcribing and reading the interviews, I realised how much I influenced their behaviour, which frequently made me question the validity of some responses.

Arguably, my status as a straight, male, white researcher already influenced their responses. For example, during one interview, when Joyce talked about the *Freelands* she presented an image of a unified and welcoming 'gay community'. She blatantly glossed over the interpersonal tensions I knew existed. This was possibly because she was attempting to construct a positive representation of gay consumers to a 'privileged outsider'. However, as I noted when discussing Darren, when conscious presentations of self were evident, or I felt I unduly influenced people's behaviours, I tried to check their

responses in other ways, or I avoided using their responses altogether. This was the advantage of a longitudinal study involving mixed methodologies.

Having outlined the methodology, the next step is to return to the research contexts. The following chapter examines the basis of what I defined in chapter 2 as 'social proximity'. It begins with an illustrative case from Hungary before discussing the determinants of proximity relations in the *Freelands*.

Notes

¹ Shils (1982: 131-2) drew a simple divide between those contexts where observation is part of everyday life (where it is deemed healthy), and observation which is made possible through some kind of intentional manipulation on the part of the researcher. While I agree with the basic philosophy of this line of argument, I do not feel this adequately recognises the duality and multiplicity involved in all social encounters. For me, partly because of the ambiguity in the definition of what constituted 'the field', but also because I am instinctively aware, such a clear divide in what was a natural encounter or a sociologically useful encounter was not as clear cut. This was especially true in the beginning as I entered venues for the first time, which was often done on a social basis.

² Whyte (1966) reflects on his experiences of similar situations, see pages 300-1 in particular.

³ For a specific example, see Pryce (1986), page 248.

⁴ See Davies (1961), Glazer (1972) and Harrell-Bond (1976) for similar accounts.

Chapter 5 Proximity

12.15 a.m., Budapest

Walking down Nagymező Utca it was easy to miss the place; there were no windows and the entrance was a small black door. A small neon sign above the door said 'Piaf' [after the singer Edith Piaf].

We rang the bell and an assertive blond-haired woman opened the door and told us it cost 500 Forints to come in and this was a 'private bar'. [Prior to our visit, others had told us about the entrance ritual. Just like a scripted greeting at a *Harvester* restaurant, the welcome was exactly as people had described it, down to the colour of her hair and her attitude.] We paid the money and stepped into a small, dark, smoke-filled room.

There was a bar on the right side and sets of low tables and chairs closely pushed together in between the bar and the door. A similar row of tables and chairs were set against the left-hand side of the room. A narrow space between the tables on the left and the bar on the right lead through to the back of the bar. A piano was squeezed into the right-hand corner facing the bar with a number of chairs and settees around it.

The bar was laid out over two floors, including an even darker cellar where dance music was playing. Both floors were darkly painted with deep reds and black intermixed; the lighting was low and the upstairs tables were lit with candles.

We sat down at one of the tables in front of the piano. Two girls in their mid 20s were sitting to the left of us. An older man was playing the piano, while a woman in her late 40s sang French 'chanson' songs. After about half an hour, the singer finished her set and the man continued to play the piano.

The proximity of the tables to the piano meant all the patrons at the tables could talk to the pianist. One of the girls sat next to us asked for some songs. He produced a songbook and she stood up and looked through it. Meanwhile, four men had sat down at the table next to the piano. Three casually dressed, all in their late 20s or early 30s. The fourth was considerably better dressed and obviously thought highly of himself.

While looking through the songbook, the girl asked about certain songs and the pianist played the first few notes from each song. After a while, the girl started to sing some of the songs she recognised, but in a quiet voice. She constantly looked up at her friend who was watching and encouraging her, showing obvious amusement and giving supportive comments. Having agreed on a song, the pianist played it and she sang it all the way through, albeit quietly and nervously. We all clapped, including the men sitting next to the piano who had also taken an interest in her performance.

They decided to try another song, and one of the men stood up and started to look through the songbook. The three of them agreed on a new number and sang it. By this time, the friend of the girl had moved next to the piano alongside the other men. They sang another song, and everyone, including us, seemed to find it very amusing. More people started clapping including another two inebriated men, who, until then, had been having a loud conversation at a table just to the right of us. Alongside clapping, one of the men started making a clicking noise with his mouth.

This encouraged two more men (both in their mid to late 20s) to come from one of the back tables to come and join in. The newcomers and the three still-seated men offered suggestions. Most of these were Hungarian quasi-folk songs from the 1970s onwards. The singing got louder and the girl who

instigated the performance started to sing with more confidence. All the men seated at the front were singing by now, except for the well-dressed man who seemed to be above such behaviour. Another older man (late 40s) came over from the back of the bar and joined in the impromptu concert. They were all visibly enjoying themselves and constantly exchanged smiles and comments. This went on for about 20 minutes, after which time, they seemed to get bored. The two men went back to their tables at the back and the girl sat down with her friend next to the four men. The older man hovered around for a while but eventually went back to his table at the back of the bar. The two girls continued drinking and talking to the men but they went their separate ways after a while. One of the two drunken men to the right of us kept clapping and making noises after the others stopped singing. This noise was audible throughout the bar and the assertive blonde-haired woman went up to him after a while and asked if he was 'O.K.', which effectively meant 'stop doing that'.

Although the case above is synchronic, and geographically specific, it reflects broader themes concerning proximity and the production and consumption of hospitality. Highlighting these themes paves the way for a diachronic examination of social relations and hospitality exchange in other spatial locations.

The first concerns the issue of physical ecology. The layout of the bar meant people were physically close together, which meant they were more likely to interact. The second concerns the issues of personal biography and shared knowledge. The participants did not know each other before they met that night. This was certainly true for the two women and the four men as they did not acknowledge each other when the men sat down. I suspected this was true for the two young men and the older man from

the back of the room. As soon as the collective act of singing was over, they went back to their tables instead of staying to communicate. None of the younger men attempted to engage the older man in any conversation.

Their sense of shared knowledge came from their experience of Hungarian culture, which was reflected in their knowledge of folk songs. This was a point of commonality where they came into closer proximity to each other. For that 20-minute period, they could all participate in the 'focused activity' (Goffman 1963) of singing. There were certainly instigators who led the effort. The principal actors were the pianist in encouraging people to offer suggestions for songs, the girl who stood up, and the man who initially stood up and joined in. However, everyone in the vicinity played an active part. Even watching, laughing and clapping encouraged the playful sentiment; this of course included my girlfriend and me as participants.

The sense of atmosphere can be considered from two points of view. First, consider the role of the producers-as-facilitators. The management constructed the atmosphere through the colours, the piano and the lighting. Simultaneously, they *allowed* this kind of behaviour to go on. Alternatively, viewing the consumer-as-producer, the atmosphere was generated situationally as people came together in a specific point in space and time. They created a 'social moment', which was understood by the participants as a 'happening'.

The notion of agency on the part of the producers and consumers must also consider the notion of time. This event took place over 15 – 20 minutes. During this short period, a number of interests and motivations intersected to create a social event, a sense of commonality. The notion of concentrated timing appears critical. People found novelty, amusement and a sense of commonality for a short period. The social unit was the strongest and most coherent during a very short period when everyone sang and joined in. The sense of commonality was potentially exhausted after a while and the people

separated. Although, the girls began talking to the other men, how their relationship continued after that night is questionable.

The social unit acted coherently because the visible exercise of common knowledge (a kind of cultural capital) served to articulate a sense of commonality. Knowing the songs was one part of it. The other was being reflexively sensitive to what song to suggest, how to suggest it, and the length of their joint activity. The drunken man did not follow these implicitly defined rules and kept making noise after the singing had finished, and the moment had passed. He was subsequently reprimanded. Some people were more enthusiastic and came into closer proximity in that brief social moment although others (i.e., the well-dressed, self-conscious man) were more distanced from it all. I asked the stern blond-haired woman if this was a regular event. She hesitantly said: 'it has been known', which indicated it was not the norm.

Admittedly, the ethnographic gaze may seem to project a sense of value on to the moment. Nevertheless, some social event undeniably took place in that 20-minute period. By looking at the expressions of mutual amusement and enthusiasm in terms of participation, it seems apparent that everyone took an active part in that collective moment. In that brief period, some sense of coherence and closeness was articulated. They identified with each other; even it was in limited ways and for a limited time.

The influence of the physical ecology, shared knowledge, social position, the performative interaction, and the agencies of hosts and guests become essential themes in the production and consumption of hospitality. More importantly, this case illustrates how the private, social and commercial aspects of hospitality intersect to form a collective experience. Within the following section, I will examine how these and related themes operated in the case of the *Freelands*.

Spatial/ecological factors

Physical space and layout

It is obvious to conclude that the size of the spaces of consumption is significantly going to influence people's interaction patterns. Caplow and Forman (1950) and Gullahorn (1952) have demonstrated in a number of contexts that as physical proximity decreases, the opportunity, and therefore, the likelihood of interaction, increases. Smaller spaces, of which the *Freelands* was an example, mean people are physically closer together. This means they are more likely to come into contact with each other, either through mutual awareness or by actual engaging in conversation (which may then lead on to other sorts of physical interaction).

Coupled to this was the physical layout of the venue; certain areas of the bar were more or less open, and therefore, more or less freely accessible. The openness and accessibility of more central zones (such as the bar area) meant people were more likely to engage in personal interaction, even if this was very short-lived. People were most likely to exchange comments at the bar, either because they were waiting to be served or if they sat at the bar. These directly contrasted with the more peripheral zones such as the tables and chairs at the edges. Even here, people who sat at tables that were directly next to each other were more likely to interact. Nevertheless, these areas were much more private, especially when occupied.

The term occupation has strong connotations. When individuals, and groups of people, occupied areas, they temporarily became semi-private property, where boundaries existed. More specifically, as Sommer (1967) concluded, people articulate their territoriality through their *position* and *posture*. Position here refers to a person's location. For example, occupying corners, and the edges of space, had different

implications than occupying more accessible, central positions. I continually noted that couples usually took their drinks and sat alone at one of the back tables. This was certainly true for lesbian couples, especially those over 30. People did not pass through or spend any real length of time there unless they were doing so purposively. Entry into these semi-private zones was often treated as visible transgression.

The 'three musketeers' were sitting at the front right hand table.¹ Mike [an older closeted bisexual man] went over to their table and started to talk to them. I could see his body language changed and he seemed visibly nervous. He was drinking more rapidly than before and tried on several occasions to adjust to their eye level. The three of them were seated and Mike first tried leaning on their table and then sitting on the neighbouring table. On both occasions, he stood back up quickly and his pose shifted constantly. I could not hear their conversation but I could see he was not having too much luck. The responses of the three men were brief and they constantly exchanged looks. After a few minutes, Mike came back to the bar and just said: "this place is full of weirdoes." [...] I asked him why he said that and he went on to make other derogatory comments about the three men without giving an explanation. [...] It seemed his approach was not welcome.

Posture concerns the attitude of particular individuals, and groups of individuals, in terms of their territorialisation of specific spatial zones. Posture can be aggressive or defensive, or a combination of both; and assertion of personal territory often worked through 'offensive display' or 'avoidance' (Sommer 1967: 658).

Regulars Kerri, Patrick and John had a tendency to visibly occupy noticeable areas of

the bar during their visits. Clothes and bags on chairs, mobile phones, newspapers, magazines, and cigarettes were spread out on the bar, and they tended to buy their next set of drinks before finishing their previous ones. This meant there were usually extra glasses around them making their space seem even more cluttered. These territorial displays are not unique to the *Freelands* and exist in all commercial hospitality establishments to some extent. It is interesting to note that regulars often left their belongings at the bar unattended, which reflected their confidence that their possession, or their place at the bar, would not be interfered with.

In contrast to these offensive displays of territory, people often concentrated on their mobile phones or on reading magazines in order to avoid eye contact, which indicated their disinterest in the encounter. When these subtleties were not appropriate, people resorted to more obvious avoidance strategies:

A Scottish man came in during the afternoon and proceeded to get drunk. [...] He had been talking his way around the bar, moving from one person to another. Steve was obviously not interested in what he had to say and when he bought Steve a drink, Steve turned around and took it upstairs, which upset the man. [...] As he had no one to talk to, he offered to buy Dave and myself a drink. [...] He started to tell a joke to Dave but he blatantly turned his back to him. This made him even more upset and he started to curse at Dave. [...] He went around the bar trying to talk to others, with similar results.

There is also a psychological aspect to design and layout that concerns the significance of different materials (colours and textures) and whether they are more or less conducive to social interaction. However, I will not address these issues at this point.

Social-spatial factors

Space cannot be considered in isolation from the people who make use of it. As mentioned before, the volume of people in the venue, and their spatial concentration, directly affected their propensity to interact. People simply did not have as much space to personalise and the physical proximity between them got smaller. Consequently, they were more likely to engage in some kind of interaction. However, this did not simply mean more people equalled more interaction. Furthermore, it is obvious to note that not all interaction was the same. While people engaged in smaller token exchanges (glances or brief but impersonal comments) these were not necessarily meaningful encounters. Although, this may of course been the beginning of a lengthier relationship.

Warren was in a flirtatious mood tonight. He kept making suggestive comments all night. [...] On one occasion when he came to the bar, he turned to an older man who was sitting on his own and asked if he was 'alright'. The man's face lit up and they exchanged a few token comments. [...] After that, every time he came to the bar the man tried to talk to him again. Warren would always turn around and make faces at me ridiculing the man, later calling him 'lecherous'.

Weeknights for example, when people frequently came in on their own, sometimes offered better opportunities to have lengthier and more in-depth encounters. People usually sat around the bar (spending extended periods seated) where they had opportunities to strike up conversations with others around the bar area. People were not open to so many social or environmental distractions and could focus their attention to a limited number of encounters. However, on quiet (mostly week) nights people tended to

disperse in space, often sitting at the peripheral tables. This also made an encounter more apparent. As Mike's example above illustrated, approaching such a table meant visibly moving across space from one zone into another, which implied a willingness to engage in some encounter. On busy nights, encounters were part of a general 'social noise' of encounters, and it was down to individuals to filter out the more significant or potentially lengthy ones.

On weekend nights, people were more likely to come and meet in groups, which often meant occupying certain zones within the bar. People could join groups or talk to individuals in groups. In the same way, members of these groups could move out of these zones and intermingle. However, these group formations often acted as boundaries to others, which limited their opportunity to interact.

Environmental factors

In considering environmental aspects, I shall focus my attention to music and lighting; these were the two most significant factors that influenced the atmosphere, and consequently, people's interaction. I have chosen to ignore issues such as temperature for the time being which I did not consider significant, in this case.²

Lighting, in terms of brightness and colour marked the shift from the day to night in the bar. During the day the blinds tended to be open and the lighting inside was subdued and functional. However, as the evening approached the management lowered the blinds and turned on an array of colourful, often flashing, disco lights. It is interesting to note, that the closer we got to the weekend the more colourful lights were turned on. Steve said this was important to differentiate between a more restrained bar atmosphere in the week and a more club-like atmosphere on weekends.

Coupled to this was the type of music played and the loudness. The significance of this

is the way it served to create atmosphere instantaneously.

It was a quiet [Tuesday] night tonight. [...] Three young people, two young men and a young girl were in this evening. [...] The two young men were both wearing skin-tight vests and had that *Boyz* look about them [young, fashionably dressed, elaborate hairstyles, clean-shaven with white teeth]. [...] I tried playing Kevin Yost [low-key jazz influenced house music]. After a while, the girl came to the bar and asked if we could turn the jukebox on. [...] They played the usual pop selection. [...] About ten minutes after they started feeding the machine one of them came to the bar and ordered three tequilas. [...] Next thing I saw the three of them were dancing wildly in the back left side [the rest of the pub was empty].

Both lighting effects and music actively transformed a quiet 'back-street' pub into an energised space. Although the importance of music is something I shall expand on later, it is important to recognise how changes in environmental conditions were used to project character onto space. Furthermore, it is crucial to appreciate how these changes in the environmental conditions potentially influenced people's interaction routines.

The creation of a quasi-club environment potentially acted as a uniting factor as people were collectively encouraged to engage in overt displays of physical consumption, i.e. dancing. I am suggesting that dancing is a form of consumption because it reflects an overt participation in the experience. This is an important point, as people often appeared to consume the playful social experience above everything else.

Conversely, the loudness of the music meant people often found it difficult to engage in any meaningful conversation. This is a recognised 'trick' in the licensed trade as people compensate for the awkwardness of standing around and not talking by drinking more

as a substitute activity. Therefore, music (and the associated lighting effects) served to project a sense of social energy onto a space. However, the loud music often increased the proximity between consumers by limiting their ability to interact.

Dimmed lights, loud music, as well as the effects of alcohol, served to distort and obscure. These were conscious acts of symbolic inversion and all these elements elevated the status of the experience. When walking up to the place, all people were able to see were the slivers of coloured lights that escaped from the edges of the blinds, while the loud music could be heard from some distance down the road. There was a clear distinction between different ecologies of hospitality and a conscious separation of one type of social order from another.

Personal and interpersonal factors

Personal determinants

Age, looks, sex, gender, sexuality, class, race and ability as signifiers

It is obvious to suggest that signifiers, such as *looks*, *age* and *sex* serve to position the individual. Within the production and consumption of the hospitality experience these all serve as essential markers of individual status. Perhaps more importantly, looks, sex and age serve to define the experience of commercial hospitality space. Establishments like *Nobu* and *Sandersons* in London are famous for hiring staff because of their model looks. As I noted in chapter 2, frontline staff are the embodied manifestation of the cultural values of both the organisation and the consumer; notions of physical perfection are used to signify the cultural ideals surrounding both the venue and the clientele, as superior. This is a clear illustration of how the body is transformed into 'aesthetic

capital', which then has exchange value in terms of both symbolic and economic capital.

Aesthetic capital is primarily physical, based around socially constructed bodily ideals, although it is enhanced through items such as clothing. Consequently, it is directly linked to access to economic capital. Within private and social hospitality relationships, it is used to affirm membership of social groups; it reflects the mobilisation of social capital as people with access to aesthetic capital may have increased social mobility.

The objectification of the body, as signifier, becomes even more prominent in a social space occupied primarily by gay consumers. The popular imagery of gay cultural discourses in magazines such as *Boyz* serves to reaffirm physical features such as a slender youthful figure, well-defined muscles, or a 'handsome' face as culturally ideal forms. Individuals take up relationships with these culturally specific images. People position themselves as they adopt, reject or appropriate some translation of them. Furthermore, in a culture where youth is generally idealised, age is the other most significant factor that served to unite and divide people.

In the *Freelands*, people tended to arrange themselves primarily according to age, and secondarily in terms of sub-cultural and aesthetic capital. Groups of people often formed around certain age ranges, so people aged 17-20, 21-27, 28-34 tended to group together. Older men and women (35-45 year olds) were more likely to sit and stand separately. This was often true whether they were alone, in couples, or in small groups of three or four. People above 45 (our oldest client being around 80) tended to drink alone or with a small group of friends (1-3 people).

There was considerable overlap between these age ranges based on the principle that the closer people were to their age group the more likely they were to engage with them. For example, it was more common to see 17-20 year olds mixing with 21-27 year olds, than the 17-20 year olds mixing with an older generation. In formulaic terms, there was

a negative correlation between the age difference and the likelihood of interaction; so the greater the age difference, the less likelihood there was of interaction. The majority of the entries listed under the keyword 'isolates' in the diary were people above 40, and most were over 50.

The existing networks of friends partly explained this, but there were also perceptual boundaries that existed, which I will address in more detail in chapter 8. Naturally, age did not consistently divide these groupings. Individuals could move around socially, although people's 'range', i.e., the number of people they could take up extended interactions with, became narrower the older they were.

A man (c.65) was sitting on the back left table drinking Guinness. When he stood up a group of youngsters sat down at his table. I could see he looked back and his expression seemed to indicate he had intended to sit back down. There were still chairs free at the table but he stayed at the bar. [...]
He tried to talk to one group of three people but they were noticeably dismissive. They replied with a nonchalant 'yeah' and avoided eye contact; after two questions, the man closest to him turned his back on the man. [...]
He tried to talk to several people at the bar and moved from one end across to the other.

Whatever their actual intentions were, whenever older men (and it was usually men) tried to talk to younger men, this was usually perceived as an invasive come-on. More importantly, they were usually dismissed:

'Mr Coke' [c.70] was in again tonight. [As always] he sat on the back right table on his own. When he came to the bar, he said 'hello' to me and to

another young man who was at the other end of the bar. He [the young man] gave a token 'alright' back, but that was it. [...] When I turned to him he rolled his eyes and said: "oh god, he is such a letch. He is always trying it on."

Looks also worked as a more subtle but evident status marker that defined proximity between individuals. For example, as Scott and Colin, both in their early 20s, said about the scene in general:

Scott: I would only speak to the best, if you know what I mean? It makes you the best. It puts you into another category and you get the people that speak to the same sort of people.

Colin: Yeah.

Scott: The good-looking people speak to the good-looking people. The ugly people speak to the ugly people. It comes down to that.

Peter: Do you think that's still the case in here?

Scott: Yeah, yeah.

Colin: That is a natural thing. I mean, do you want to sleep with ugly people?

However, social position and relative status also depended on other intersecting

variables, as Scott and Colin went on to illustrate:

Colin: As soon as you're over 30, that's it.

Scott: If you ain't got no money, then you ain't getting nowhere.

Colin: You ain't got no money, and you are over 30 and you ain't got no labels on. If you ain't got a designer label on and you've got looks on your side than it don't matter. Yeah, but if you are not like model material, you're not wearing the model material then you are... [Pause] ...you get all these bitchy little things rip it out of you.

If one considers the bar to be sexualised space then the issue is one of aesthetics and desire. There was a noticeable tendency for people of similar physical qualities to come together and form relationships. This should not be read as determinism, i.e., that your culturally accepted status in terms of looks determined your compatibility with others. However, in a culture where display is a fundamental element, physical features served as critical signifiers of value, and to some extent, status. Again, this should not be seen as an exclusive quality of the *Freelands*, or the gay scene in general. Nevertheless, these divisions are overtly visible and heavily emphasised within gay culture and its representations.

Sex, or more precisely, *gender*, also served to locate individuals. Women, with a few exceptions, very rarely came on their own, usually coming in couples or in units. These couples and groups tended to occupy zones that served to isolate them as social units, thereby increasing the proximity between them and others outside the unit. As always, the boundaries of these units were porous, but their stability as units remained relatively

consistent. Women, especially lesbian women, were more likely to come in with a unit and leave with the same unit. Therefore, the networks of friends that individual women associated with could partly account for their proximity with others. I will return to this in the following section on interpersonal factors.

Proximity in terms of gender directly intersected with issues of sexuality. For example, it was more usual to see straight women mixing with gay men than lesbian women mixing with gay or straight men. Similarly, straight women mixed less often with lesbian women and most of the examples of this occurred because straight and gay women knew each other outside of the venue.

It is necessary to comment on transsexuality and transvestisms, although very few transsexuals or transvestites came to the *Freelands*. I only ever met one serious transsexual, Jamie, who was awaiting his sex-change operation. Along with his friend, Kris, a transvestite who regularly wore 'hyper-feminine' clothes (e.g. short skirts, stockings and six-inch tall platform stilettos), they were part of a group of young people into the 'Goth scene'. Kris and many of his friends were pale, heavily pierced with mostly silver studs and earrings; they tended to wear black clothes, dye their hair black and wore make-up. As such, they already represented 'alternative' lifestyle discourses and tended to socialise together, coming and leaving as one group. As far as I knew, people were always sociable towards Jamie, although after a violent incident in May 2001 (see chapter 6), Jamie stopped coming to the bar, so I could not pursue this issue with him.

Interestingly, 'carnavalesque' drag acts were treated enthusiastically by most people, while Kris' lifestyle choices were not accepted so openly. When Kris was fully dressed and made up, he often received cynical looks from the people in the pub, although those who knew him tended to be sociable toward him. I do not think people's dissent was provoked by the alternative discourses of gender, but by the alternative lifestyle genres

he adopted. This undoubtedly influenced the proximity relations between him and other people, although this does not accurately reflect the way transvestisms or transsexuality influenced proximity relations. When I asked informants about attitudes towards transsexuals or transvestites, they tended to refer to Kris as the only example in the *Freelands*, so these issues remained unexamined.

Expressions of socio-sexual and gendered identities, often served as principal signifiers. Bisexuality as a sexual category, with its liminal status, meant self-confessed bisexuals could potentially find themselves distanced from gay people as much as they were dislocated from straight culture. Because of its negative connotations, people were often reluctant to adopt bisexuality as a status marker. Bisexuality was often a shifting signifier that people sometimes used overtly to legitimise their interest in both sexes. James was a good example of this. I never heard him talking about his sexual desires toward women and his conversations about partners were focused on 'chickens' (see notes).

Two young girls were sitting at the left hand end of the bar. [...] James went over, started talking to them and bought them several rounds of drinks. [Later] James was kissing one of the girls just before they left. [...] I said to James: 'I never knew you were the sort.' He responded with: 'I have always been 'bi'.'

Despite this, I never heard him talking about women after that and his conversations in the *Freelands* were always about men.

People's attitudes towards popularised discourses of dissident socio-sexual and gendered identities (i.e. 'chicken', 'scene queen', 'muscle Mary', 'butch dyke', 'lipstick lesbian') also served to articulate similarity or difference.³ These labels or discourses of

socio-sexual or gendered identification are constructed through speech acts, bodily gestures, physical body forms, and cultural objects. Identification works on the principle of incorporation and adaptation of these various elements as one creates a social persona. Naturally, following Bourdieu, choosing one thing implies choosing against something else. Therefore, any act of inclusion must include some element of rejection and exclusion.

For example, a 30 year old could wear a tight top and display a fashionable Mohican hair cut, but act masculine, despite these signifiers being generally associated with a chicken or a scene queen. Jenny (18) explained that she could transform herself from a 'lipstick lesbian' into a 'butch' or 'tomboy' using clothing, makeup and a change of hairstyle.

Jenny had long hair, which she could manipulate, whereas many other women had short hair, which limited their ability to transform their self-image. The range of possibilities for such a transformation was directly limited to ones age and physical attributes. Most of my informants acknowledged that it was unreasonable for an overweight or 'unexercised' person, to wear tight, body hugging sleeveless tops. The same was true for people above a certain age, although this did depend largely on the person's physical qualities.

Besides the most prominent signal, clothing (which definitely included headwear), more subtle items such as perfumes, sunglasses, mobile phones, piercings, jewellery, tattoos and drugs all served to situate the person.

Joyce: What do you reckon, do you like my sunglasses? [She said this quite proudly while putting them on]

Scott: Aaaarrh they're fake!!! [In a dismissive and cynical tone] I can

always tell fake things; I am the ultimate fashion queen!

Joyce: [More despondently] Yeah, I got them in Woolwich Market. [She took them off and put them away.]

Douglas and Isherwood (1996), Hebdige (1979), Miller (1998) and Miller et al (1998) have talked extensively about material culture as direct status markers. These cultural objects were the subtle 'system of signals' which then came to be read as 'systems of signs'. They were the seemingly microscopic details that intersected to form a larger totality. These signals and signs acted as points of reference in the process of identification.

These details clarified certain social positions and undermined others. For example, one of the customers, Lewis, spoke with an upper class accent and most people assumed he represented a different class. However, his mobile phone was bulky and distinctly old, indicative of a different economic status. People commented on that repeatedly.

Class and its various expressions was problematic because class position manifested itself in numerous and often subtle ways. To begin, it is useful to examine the way educational levels and the access to educational and cultural capital acted as signifiers of class status. The discussion will then consider the indirect relationship between socio-economical position and education.

To return to the problem that Lewis' case illustrated, the way people spoke often indicated their class background (or perceived class background). This brought them closer to some people but distanced them from others. Most of my informants concluded that people from 'lower' or 'lower-middle' class backgrounds frequented the pub.⁴ This was not evident from their professions; a large number were in 'white-collar' professional jobs. Their everyday speech acts were the discernible indicators used to

assess their cultural background, and their habitus.

For example, Warren, (the boyfriend of one of my key informants, Daniel) said:

[T]here are a couple of people who talk very well – very articulate. I don't seem to see them as having as many people around them as... [Pause]. They talk very well; they come across as very kind of upper-class or middle-class. I tend to find they don't have people hanging around with them.

However, the issue here was not simply about the style of speech, but also the topic of conversations. Robert and Damien were good examples of this; they were both university educated at postgraduate level. Both were well-spoken and Damien in particular always used elaborate and esoteric terminology. Damien visibly (and audibly) occupied space; he talked loudly and constantly laughed at his own observations. They tended to talk about art, philosophy, politics, and would debate things at length. They tended to sit at the bar and people buying drinks frequently pulled faces indicating dissent or disassociation when hearing their conversation. On another occasion, I asked Jeff (one of the other regulars) who was running for a local council position to tell me about his policies. Jeff said he did not want to: 'do a Robert and Damien on it.' They had become a speech genre.

On one July afternoon, I was working at the bar with only one of the regulars, Harry, sitting at the bar. Harry was a painter and decorator and later worked as a 'debt collector' for some 'private lenders'. Whenever Harry was in, he sat at the bar and talked to me, mostly asking if I was 'alright' repeatedly. Harry was talkative and always contributed to conversations. On one afternoon, a man in his mid 40s came in. He had come all the way from a small town some considerable distance away. We started talking about Europe and he told me stories about when he was a teacher in Poland and

Sweden. Harry sat right next to this man by the bar and watched our conversation. However, he did not join in, even though there were several pauses and opportunities for him to talk. This stranger and I switched topics a few times, talking about different cultural customs, books, as well as our travel experiences. So far, Harry said nothing, but when the topic got around to barmen, Harry immediately joined in again.

In the beginning, Harry did not join in because he did not have the opportunity, but because he did not have right set of experiences that enabled him to contribute. Many of those experiences (around culture, travel and literature) relied on having the necessary education, habitus, and ultimately, class-position. When confronted by those, seemingly alien topics, the sense of proximity between us increased.

Bernstein's (1964, 1971, 1972) distinction between restricted and elaborated social codes of communication was useful in understanding Harry's case. According to Bernstein, these modes of communication often reflected class positions. People from lower classes tended to have more restricted modes of communication. These codes were more predictable because they involved limited variations. This was in contrast to elaborated codes, which had greater variations and reflected access to broader types of educational and cultural capital.

These examples indicated that class backgrounds, in terms of education and habitus constricted social repertoire. These examples also reflected that a sense of distance or exclusion worked both ways. Perceived class status and compatibility directly affected people's inclusion or exclusion in social situations.

Lastly, I will consider a series of statements made by some of my informants on class as a signifier of social position. These reflect a further problem concerning the definitions of class.

Peter: Do you think there is a class divide in here?

Scott: Yeah there is a class divide. But it is not as big as the scene is. It is only a little pub.

Colin: It is the normal class divide that you get in any pub. It's nothing that sticks out. You get the few snotty people who go: 'I've got designer this and I've got designer that and the other.' But really that's few [*sic*] because either they want to sleep with you and they get the gold cards out, or on the other hand they have a very low self-confidence and they are boosting themselves anyway.

When I asked Scott how he felt class served to unite or divide people, he said that he mixed with a certain class of people. He explained that he only talked to a certain type of person in clubs like *Heaven* in London. They were the 'beautiful people', a kind of 'Alpha' group by his definition. He was a recognised part of that social milieu which he considered a class of person. As Nathan, another man in his early 20s said: "it's snobbery and bitchiness: it's the gay form of class. If you're not wearing *Vivien Westwood* or *Calvin Klein*, it's like 'ohmigod'; you must be a 'pikey' or something; you are a real lowlife."

The term class for them implied a status system, which was closely infused with access to aesthetic capital and subcultural capital. Despite this, Scott did comment on Lewis (who was educated at a private school and was very well spoken) saying: "he talks like he is better than me but he ain't." Scott was aware of existing markers of class position. However, for them, there were also specific (sub)culturally defined qualities. These additional signifiers of status incorporate other elements of self-presentation. In a (sub)culture where aesthetic capital was very important, status in a hierarchy was

determined by access to various sorts of capital other than economic, cultural or educational.

In all my conversations with people about class, I felt that the older the person, the more their perceptions of class relied on educational background and employment. Younger people were more likely to define class in terms of broader performative displays of status. These relied as much on subcultural capital, and subculturally defined status markers such as aesthetics and style as much as other types of economic or cultural capital. However, this is a difficult point to generalise. Most people acknowledged the blurred boundaries between different classes and pointed to ambiguities in defining class position. Nevertheless, performative displays (in terms of mannerisms and speech), your occupation, and the area you lived in, still served as relatively stable markers on which to base perceptions.

Some people labelled others such as Ritchie and Joe lower class because of the way they spoke, and the way they acted. Their coarse English, and their loud and aggressive behaviour intimidated a number of people. This distanced them from many others in the *Freelands*; this included me for a long time. They did not attempt to project a different social identity. Conversely, Patrick for example consciously called people 'sweetie' in an upper class accent and proudly showed off his 'Harvey Nick's' store cards. During one birthday celebration, having given the greeting card he insisted the recipient looked on the back of the card which showed where he had bought it (Harvey Nichols of course). These displays were deliberately ironic, although they still served as performative displays of status that drew on references to higher class positions.

Race plays a minor part in this thesis primarily because the bar was mainly frequented by white clientele. I asked all my informants why they thought so few non-white people come to the bar. Most offered explanations that were relatively self-evident. The bar was located in a predominantly white area on the periphery of London. The locals were

mostly white and more ethnically mixed areas tended to be located further in London where there was a greater concentration of gay bars and clubs. This meant there were few reasons for people from inner city areas (of any race) to come to Compton in the first place.

Of the very few non-white people that came to the bar, most received a friendly welcome, although there were a few exceptions. Young, socially mobile people who were integrated into the gay scene were never subject to any overt racism. There were a few incidents where transient visitors received comments from Ritchie and Joe. However, their transient 'outsider' status, old age and their obvious disassociation from the gay scene contributed to their alienation.

In particular, a group of men of Iranian descent used to come to the bar every few months. On one afternoon, the men were sitting at one of the side tables while Joe, Ritchie, Dave and I were at the bar. Ritchie and Joe started to talk to them across the room. It was generally friendly except Joe asked them whether they: 'ran a curry house' and told them to: 'make him a curry.' His boyfriend Ritchie obviously disapproved and tried to gloss over the comment. The two men did not seem too offended but I doubt this kind of comment made them feel very welcome. In any case, in a later conversation, Daley (the older brother of the second man, Nav) still claimed they had: 'never really had any trouble.' He referred to this place as: 'a very friendly pub', although they remained infrequent visitors.

However, I was offered an interesting set of clues concerning other potential reasons for the small number of non-whites coming to the bar. The second manager I worked under (Jill) had run a number of pubs in more ethnically mixed areas. She had a boyfriend of Afro-Caribbean descent at that time. One day when we were all sat at the bar, Jill was talking about her boyfriend, and I asked whether we were ever going to meet him. She said no, as he was black, and even though he had mixed family and friends (meaning

some were more liberal than others were), he was wary about coming here. He knew Compton was a predominantly white area and felt he would be obviously out of place. More importantly, she said: “homosexuality is treated as a great taboo where he comes from.” He did not feel comfortable being around gay people. Similarly, when Jill’s other non-white friends came to the bar they often remained spatially fixed; they stayed close to her and did not walk around or socialise. Jill often introduced people and only mentioned they were gay after they had been talking for a while. She said it was a way for them to: “get used to the idea that they had nothing to be scared of.”

The last set of personal characteristics concern *physical* and *mental ability*. A number of mentally-impaired people came to the bar. Steve (the manager) and one of the regular bar-staff Marcus referred to the *Freelands* as ‘care in the community’. They regularly made jokes about mentally-impaired people, although these facetious comments were never expressed directly to the customers in question. Steve and Marcus concluded that the reason so many disabled people came to the *Freelands* was because they did not ‘get the hassle’ here that they would elsewhere in Compton. The idea was that others could engage with the myths of the bar as a liminal ‘safe space’. This was a difficult idea to test and one I never really addressed. I tried to interview a number of regular disabled clients although none of them pointed to the safety aspects of the bar. They tended to emphasise that this was a fun place to come and have a drink.

Mental impairment did directly influence proximity relations. Impairment reflected a ‘spoiled identity’ (Goffman 1968) and the severity correlated with the potential for exclusion. For example, Ken was a registered schizophrenic and one of the regular customers. People were usually civil to him although interactions generally only extended to token conversations. When his name was brought up in conversation people usually made derogatory comments about him. Ken’s regular drink was *Britvic 55* orange and some people started asking for a ‘Ken’ at the bar when they wanted these

drinks. He became a 'character' in the bar, although he was usually marginalised. Another, older man who was severely disabled was practically ignored in the bar by everyone except the staff.

Physical disability also remained relatively unexplored in my research. The most prominent examples of physical disability in the *Freelands* were the deaf people who came to the bar. Most were regulars and more or less integrated into particular social units. A few deaf people came with their deaf boyfriends and maintained their own social unit, although most tried to interact with others. When deaf people came alone, their proximity relations were largely determined by their ability to communicate, and the patience of other people. Communicative skills also intersected with access to aesthetic capital and personality. Leslie, who was in his early 20s, regularly came on his own and often managed to find social and sexual companionship. He usually carried paper with him and I regularly saw Les spend entire evenings sitting with men exchanging notes. Therefore, issues of disability and proximity relations also depended on the motivations of other people who were participating in the interaction.

Personal history and biography (outside of the consuming environment)

Categories and experience

It was possible to categorise experiences that may have influenced a sense of proximity. These categories revolved around three broad and necessarily overlapping nexus types: the 'cultural-individual', the 'cultural-spatial', and the 'textual-discursive'. *Cultural-individual* concerned experiences linked to individuals and their associated cultures. These were not specific categories of people, but fluid typological labels based on approximate labelling, i.e., 'people like that'. People of a certain kind were treated as a

'type of person', which then predetermined the nature of the future encounters. When I asked what sort of people came to the *Freelands* or other places, most responses were like Joyce's below:

You get the dirty bastards like Len, the little queens, the annoying little bastards like Smurf, the old queens like Len.

The majority of older men were automatically labelled 'perverts' or 'dirty old men'. Again, this reflected the importance placed on youth and sex within the *Freelands*, and in gay culture in general. As I mentioned before, when older men tried to start conversations with younger men, their motives were usually assumed to be sexual.

Lesbians were usually labelled 'dykes', which most men used derogatively. This was especially true when there were no women in their particular unit. Dyke implied masculinity and aggression; images which lesbians not only acknowledged, but also consciously perpetuated.

You seem to get the dykey women going straight for the pool table, whoom! One of the gay blokes down in Eastbourne said: 'oh God, bloody dykes on the pool table, here we go.' The men down there know; the pool table brings the girls. (Female informant)

In another interview, Joyce reflected similar views about masculine women. She mentioned numerous incidents of 'butch' women wanting to start fights and felt distanced from one particular East London bar, which was mainly patronised by lesbians:

Everybody in their own little groups and they all want to beat each other up.

I just couldn't drink in a place like that. You know. Is so and so in the pub?

No, I am not going in there cause she's threatening to kick my head in.

In terms of proximity relations, women, especially those labelled dykes, were often treated as outsiders in the *Freelands*. It was not so much overt tension and people were rarely directly rude to women. Nevertheless, there was always less interaction between gay men and lesbians, and cynical comments were frequent.

Helen and Jackie got their mountain bikes from the garden and left. As soon as they went one of the men at the bar said: 'there go the dykes on bikes.'

Similarly, as the following interview extract illustrates, masculine lesbian women were treated with some contempt.

Ritchie: Women are alright, it's just the dykes.

Peter: You lot mentioned that the other day. Do you get a lot of trouble in here then?

Ritchie: Nah. But straight women, they finds us fascinating really don't they? There is no threat. And you have these dykes, that walk about, with short hair. Giving it all the large.

Similarly, terms such as 'queens' or 'screaming queens' were typically projected onto men displaying feminine behaviours. For most of the time, these were used pejoratively

when people made comments like: 'oh just ignore him, he is just being a drama queen.' Clichéd performances of sexual selves often served to distance these people, especially from older 'straight-acting' and closeted customers such as Mike.

Cultural-spatial, were experiences linked to specific kinds of spatial environments and their associated cultures. For example, there was a venue close to the *Freelands* which had a distinct set of place-myths associated with it. The *Roadhouse* was located in a distinctly 'rougher' area and had later opening hours.

Kerri: It [the *Roadhouse*] should have a health warning on the door saying you should never pull anyone from in here. You always wake up the next morning and go 'aaargh'!

Peter: How would you describe the people who go there?

Kerri: Scum! I am sorry I am being a bit of a snob, but they're scum. I have picked up three people from there. Sue who wanted to be an opera singer but cleaned bedpans in an old people's home. I remember the following morning she was going to the bathroom at six o'clock in the morning. The next thing I know Lars is waking me up going: 'shut her up!' She is in the bathroom signing opera at the top of her voice at six in the morning. I couldn't get rid of her till lunch time.

Similarly, as Joyce noted in a different interview:

Peter: What sort of place is the *Roadhouse*? How would you describe it to other people?

Joyce: Dive. It's just full of nutters in there. I have never pulled at the *Roadhouse* and I have no intention of doing so whatsoever. The women down there; some of them are 'skanky'! The time before, Anna started talking to this guy down there and they were snogging and all that, and he went to give her a love bite and just took half her neck out. Just 'chunked' her neck! It's just full of weirdoes. That's why I don't like it down there.

The third category, the *textual-discursive* is slightly misleading because it did not necessarily involve direct experience. Places, people and cultures were often experienced through written and visual media, as well as oral histories.

Peter: What about the *Roadhouse*?

Andy: Euurgh [pulls a face showing disgust].

Peter: What makes you say that? Don't you like the *Roadhouse*?

Andy: Erm, I've never been there. [Long Pause] I heard it was a nasty place.

Andy's initial reaction indicated he had been there and did not like the place. It turned out that he had heard of this popular perception of the *Roadhouse* and was merely reproducing the place-myth.

What is important to note, is how informants often identified and grouped people and places in terms of similarity and difference. Certain types of places were located in a cosmology of hospitality spaces. Individual perceptions of these spaces intersected with

other, more widely acknowledged place-myths. In Lefebvre's terms, these were points where representations of space intersected with representational (lived) space. Furthermore, experiences of certain kinds of spatial-cultural milieus meant people were associated with specific types of place. There was considerable overlap here between what was cultural, what was individual, and the way these identities were effectively spatialised, or geographically located. As Lofland, L. illustrated, it was a case of 'you are where you go' (1973: 82).

Informants often grouped the *Roadhouse* alongside other 'seedy' and 'downmarket' venues frequented by a 'rougher' type of clientele. The status of both the hospitality space, and its consumers, usually correlated with lower levels of class, income and access to aesthetic capital. Often, when guests mentioned the *Roadhouse*, others pulled disapproving faces. Regulars to the *Roadhouse* often appeared to be tainted by their patronage, and frequently defended their visits by saying: 'I know it's a 'shithole', but you can have a laugh if you get drunk' or 'I know it's a 'dive', but at least you can have a late drink.'

The point concerning cosmologies of hospitality spaces is merely illustrative and not exhaustive. Nor is it exclusive to gay and lesbian consumers or their associated hospitality spaces. Consequently, it is something I will return to throughout the thesis. I have emphasised it here because experiences gained outside of the immediate consuming environment (in this case the *Freelands*) had considerable influence on proximity relations.

Experiences inside place (Knowledge of place, people and culture)

Following on from the typology offered above, the next section distinguishes between knowledge gained outside of the *Freelands* from knowledge gained within. Place-

specific knowledge acted as a basis of power; knowledge of the culture that management and specific types of clientele helped to harbour informed people about permissible behaviour. More specifically, it helped to define the extent to which individuals could project their own moral and aesthetic values onto social space.

Dillon, another very regular client, was a typical example of this. Dillon often came in on quiet weekday evenings and consumed excessive amounts of alcohol. He would dance in the middle of the bar, talk to everybody and constantly ask us to play the music louder. Dillon was frequently loud and obnoxious, although he was generally friendly and chatty to most people. He frequently talked to strangers as well as people he knew. He was a regular, which meant he knew a lot of people, and most people certainly knew of him. This knowledge meant he could treat the place as 'home territory' (Cavan 1963, 1966).

I asked Dillon where else he drank and he listed a number of straight places in Compton. When we got on to the subject of who he went to these places with, he listed different groups of people he associated with different places. For example, he went to 'normal' (straight) pubs in Compton with work colleagues. When I asked whether he went to any of these places on his own, he said he would: 'never go to *other* places on his own.' I asked why he then came here on his own. His reply was straightforward: "because it's the *Freelands*, I don't give a shit here; I can do what I like!"

His sense of common interest with other people was already established, and his knowledge of this helped him to have further interactions. His knowledge offered a sense of security and safety, a sense of ownership over space because he could project his personality onto that space. People knew him, and allowed his actions to go on. However, what people knew about others, *and what others knew about them*, could also work against an individual.

Biographies

Dillon was a well-known character and his exploits were infamous. It served to alienate him from some who did not find this kind of behaviour particularly appealing. This reflected the importance of individual biographies. Obviously, the more someone came to the bar and the more they engaged with people, the more he or she knew about them. At the same time, others knew more about him or her.

As everywhere else, some people were said to be 'alright', or a 'laugh', implying trustworthiness, cultural competence, or that they were fun company. However, labelling often used more elaborate or pejorative terms. Nicknames were usually assigned as part of an informal humorous process. Tom was known as the 'cottage man' because he regularly went to the toilet, spending lengthy periods at the urinals, while John was affectionately called the 'bicycle'.

Although these started as jokes, they soon entered a public lexicon and often remained as a permanent part of character profiles within the *Freelands*. I was often called 'Martha', meaning: 'doesn't know whether he is Arthur or Martha', implying that my sexual orientation was questionable.

The 'publicness' or 'privateness' of biographies depended on how often people went there (and whether people noticed patterns in their behaviour). It depended on whom they interacted with, and how people perceived them. Naturally, some people went regularly but because they were quiet and discreet, they had a relatively private biography (see chapter 7). Meanwhile, some came in very rarely and made such an impression that people recognised them months later. This positioned these individuals and determined how people perceived them, and consequently, how they interacted with them. This issue of regularity, biography and social status is something I take up in more detail in chapter 7.

Reciprocal relationships

The reciprocal relationships referred to here were social, although they incorporated a material element as well. To understand this required the consideration of three important factors. The first was the individual's ability to create topics of conversation and the ability to articulate these topics through appropriate forms of communication. This could also be thought of in terms of access to various degrees of cultural, educational or subculturally specific capital (Thornton 1995). I appreciate that not all interaction is limited to language; some may be primarily physical, based on gestures and body language. However, all relationships must eventually incorporate some linguistic element if they are to have any longevity.

Tom and James were sitting at the bar with Julie sitting in between them slightly away from the bar. Tom and Luke were discussing their computers, using esoteric words and phrases. I could see Julie was increasingly left out. [A few minutes later] I came back into the bar and they were still talking about computers. Network connections, hubs, drives etc.; Julie looked even more distanced from it. Her facial expression was increasingly emotionless and she was staring blankly at her drink. [Tom and James both worked with computers, while Julie worked in a supermarket and could not engage with their conversation. Obviously, she did not have any interest in computers.]

Some people were simply better at making conversation, which increased their potential social mobility. They had a broader social repertoire, which meant they could transcend specific units or types of units. However, the ability to create mutual topics of interest often worked at the smallest social unit, the dyad. Admittedly, mutual interests were

interindividual, and it could be argued that they belong in the following section on interpersonal factors. Nevertheless, because it was also reliant on the personal ability to find or effectively create mutual topics of interest, I have addressed it here.

Karen, one of my informants told me that whenever she met new people and needed a topic of conversation she asked about their 'coming-out' experiences. She said this was something all gays and lesbians had in common, whether they had actually come out or not. Everyone (gay) could relate to this ready-made topic. She told me this in an interview, so following that, every time I heard Karen ask people about how they came out, I always assumed she was stuck for something to say.

Closely linked to this was the ability to communicate. However, it was not simply a matter of what was said, but how. It is axiomatic to point out that subcultural capital was dependent on knowledge of the codes of communication as much as the thematic topics of certain individuals (Thornton 1995).

Bernstein's (1964, 1971, 1972) restricted and elaborated codes were again useful in understanding this situation. However, instead of class relations, the knowledge of certain codes reflected a sense of awareness and involvement in a subculture. This is something I will return to in more detail in the chapter on myth. Suffice to say that proximity was very much reliant on being aware of specific codes (including their timing and rate of transmission) and accepted social rituals. Furthermore, proximity between individuals was dependent on whether other social actors liked the social persona that was constructed.⁵

A woman came in and stood at alone at the bar. She was quite masculine: early 30s, short curly red hair, glasses, wearing jeans and a dark sports jacket. I started my usual routine and asked where she was from and how she found out about the place. [...] Michael and Jenny came in and joined

James at the bar. [...] We were all talking and because this woman [Carol] was standing next to them she eventually joined in with their conversation. [...] They all seemed to be getting on well and at one point Carol said: "I would like to buy you all a drink." Her hands were clasped together and her offer seemed tense and uncomfortably forced. It felt like someone had run their nails down a chalkboard. I really felt for her as she seemed to be trying so hard to be part of the group. [...] They all bought rounds, including me. [...] She [Carol] talked to everyone in that group. One by one, she started conversations with people but they all just seemed to die rapidly. She eventually left. [Later] Jenny seemed quite sarcastic when I asked where she [Carol] was, saying Carol tried to pull her. [Later] When I talked to James about Carol, he said: 'what, that girl that tried to hang around with us?'

The second factor concerned individual mood, and the willingness to engage in any kind of interaction. To put it simply, some people, at certain times, did not want to engage in communication with certain others. The basis for the willingness to interact was itself dependent on the sense of proximity that people shared. However, the important point is that some people's unwillingness itself served to define the perceived proximity.

The third factor revolved around access to economic capital, and whether a person had adequate financial resources to engage in exchange rituals, or not. I treated these economic considerations separately from broader socio-economic debates. Admittedly, there was a broader relationship between socio-economic position and a person's ability to engage in specific acts of consumption. This was partly because socio-economic position directly affected the amount of disposable income a person had. Simultaneously, there was also an indirect relationship as social position affected

socialisation and the cultural circles people moved in. However, for the moment, I will concentrate on access to capital in the immediate sense.

The financial considerations play a significant part in determining a sense of proximity. As elsewhere, round buying was an important social ritual and a vital status marker (Adler, M. 1991, Clinard 1962, Fox 1993, Mars 1987, Mass Observation 1987). These exchange relationships involving alcohol, cigarettes, or drugs also suggested unit solidarity and membership. These implicitly reflected the proximity relationship between people, and, the willingness to engage in social interaction. Following Mauss, giving and receiving brought with it obligations to reciprocate; more importantly, it signified the willingness to engage in some kind of relationship.

One mixed unit (in terms of age, sex and sexual orientation) of regular drinkers regularly spent fifty pounds each during their lengthy visits, buying drinks for each other, and for the bar-staff. Liz was a close acquaintance of several members of this unit but often came by car and stayed short periods, which got her out of buying alcoholic drinks, and buying rounds. She told me this was a deliberate tactic, which she adopted in order to abstain from these reciprocal relationships. This was necessary because she had a mortgage and her financial obligations and relatively low income prevented her from participating. Leaving early or drinking soft drinks meant she did not burden others financially, or take drinks for which she could not readily reciprocate. Liz's friends were aware of her financial situation and did not hold her to these obligations. However, Liz reciprocated in other ways, often acting as an informal taxi service with her car. She picked them up and took them to places even when she was not going out with them for the evening.

What are you on?

The provision and consumption of alcohol was obviously one of the defining characteristics of the bar. The consumption of alcohol brought people together, partly as they enjoyed its affects, and as they used it as a form of symbolic exchange. However, the behaviour brought on from excessive consumption frequently served to distance and isolate people.

The man was drunk when I got there and got worse through the evening. [...] He moved around, talking to a number of people, often making sexual suggestions thinly veiled as flattering comments. These conversations were all very short as people made excuses to get away from him. [...] He went up to Julie and offered her a drink. She did not even turn her head and ignored his offer, pulling faces at the people she was facing.

Rejecting his offer was an effective way to reject his invitation to interact. Sometimes people incurred more direct actions. On the same evening, another man threatened to assault the drunken man because of his constant sexual advances, and it took three people to separate them. However, most of the time, verbal abuse sufficed. For example, on one occasion, Spencer bluntly told Lewis to: 'go away', as he: 'didn't like drunks.' Spencer occasionally bought amphetamines from Steve and knew he could count on Steve for backing. Similarly to Dillon, Spencer's relationship with the manager served to empower him within the *Freelands*.

Drugs such as amyl nitrate (poppers), amphetamines (speed), ecstasy, cocaine and cannabis were often used by consumers and also served to define proximity. However, other drugs had a wider set of moral implications to alcohol. Being drunk on one

As I was closing up, Damien [art historian/ex photographer], Robert [social worker with a background in philosophy] and another young man were sat at the bar. They were involved in a heated debate about some abstract philosophical subject. Colin and Scott [his boyfriend] sat at one of the tables at the edges. As I was walking around cleaning the tables, I noticed Colin was listening eagerly to their conversation. I went up to their table and asked Colin how he was doing. [...] He said he was trying to listen in their conversation, commenting that he thought the topic was interesting. He eventually stood up and joined in. [...] They continued talking for about fifteen minutes after which Scott got bored and dragged Colin out. Scott's only contribution to the conversation was: "I fink we are born and then we die and that's it."

Colin (a 'cockney'-accented, shaved-headed, lorry driver) had never met Robert or Damien, but in those fifteen minutes, they came closer to each other. I only ever saw Colin talk to either Damien or Robert occasionally after that day, and their meetings were usually limited to the token greetings while they met at the bar. Their general circle of friends, ages (Colin in his early 20s, Damien and Robert in their 40s and 30s respectively), their general social backgrounds, and interests meant they did not have an immediately apparent basis for a long-term relationship.

Despite this, they could still be in close proximity in specific situations. Of course, this did not rule out longer and more intensive relationships. However, the likelihood of this happening would have been greater if they shared a broader and more apparent sense of commonality. Compatibility obviously stemmed from a sense of similarity in terms of a broad range of shared interest, alongside similarity in emotional depth, maturity and sense of humour. There was also the issue of intelligence, which was often linked to

educational level. However, as the case above shows, proximities could not be reduced to this alone. Colin did not have a degree or a background in philosophy. Nevertheless, he was willing to engage in these sorts of encounters, which in itself was enough to enhance the sense of proximity between them.

When discussing shared interests, it is also worth considering how 'triadic' relationships (Newcomb 1961, Forgas 1985) influenced 'dyadic' ones. In particular, mutual dislike of someone often acted as a point of common interest. For example, Joyce (a supposedly committed lesbian) had a sexual encounter with a married man. Joyce was supposedly good friends with the man's wife, and even lived with the wife previously. Marcus, supposedly a friend of Joyce, and another one of the regulars, Kerri, did a 'hatchet job' on Joyce. This went on all night, with both of them telling anecdotes about her past indiscretions and making fun of her physical appearance. Marcus and Kerri's friendship was certainly enhanced by this experience

However, these kinds of triadic relationships were not always as malicious, although there was usually a facetious element to it. Marcus and Steve used to regularly get together and make fun of me. They used to joke about my sexual orientation and my motivations for working there. It was a performance for the benefit of other customers; they usually introduced me by saying: 'this is our straight barman, or he says he is.' This was usually accompanied by sexual innuendoes and indecent proposals. Marcus and Steve both lived on the premises and often went on lengthy drug binges. During subsequent days when coming down, they argued a lot of the time. In these situations, they turned me into an object (a common theme), with which they amused themselves. This often diffused the tension, albeit temporarily.

occasion may have distanced people from others in specific situations; being seen (and labelled) as a drug-user often served to establish a deeper sense of distance (or closeness) between people. Whereas alcohol was a more commonly accepted drug of choice, speed was also prevalent in the bar. Liz for example, adamantly opposed the use of speed and other drugs. Her friends often avoided using poppers in front of her or talking about drugs. This meant there were certain areas of social activity and levels of understanding that certain people could not share. In this case, a sense of distance was the result of opposing moral values regarding drugs.

Naturally, the 'people like that' way of approximate labelling was important here in establishing and crystallising public biographies. Some people were known to be regular cocaine or speed users. Their bad moods were often interpreted as the affects of 'coming down' after a long session. Similarly, some people, like Dillon for example, had a reputation for excessive drinking and had a tendency to engage in flamboyant displays of enjoyment. This made him a welcome spectacle at times, but also brought him considerable ridicule.

Interpersonal determinants

Shared interests

In chapter 2, I argued that the range and intensity of shared interests underpinned people's sense of proximity. Furthermore, this had the potential to set limits on a relationship. Shared interests such as liking the same places or musicians brought people closer together, even if only for short periods. The importance of this was that shared interests served as points of commonality that transcended any particular economic, social or class divide.

Shared history

I do not think it is unreasonable to describe the bar as incestuous. Because it was a small bar, with a regular set of clientele, people could get to know others quickly and easily. This was reflected in the patterns of sexual relations. While friendships had longer life spans, relationships were often short-lived. Some people engaged in purposive relationships that served some mutual physical need. Andy for example regularly talked about his 'fuck buddies' who were people he had long-term relationships with (over several months). These relationships were mutually understood to be about sexual gratification and nothing more. Nevertheless, people were very likely to bump into ex-partners. Arguments between people and tensions between ex-partners were a great source of conflict. People often stayed away from certain individuals, groups, and even from the bar itself because of some kind of 'incident' with someone else. During Kate's time as manager, the break-up of a couple's long-term relationship led to a deep division among the customers. Initially the friends of the two men began to drink elsewhere; however, when the two men and their friends returned to the bar, many other began to stay away because of the hostile atmosphere. This one break-up noticeably influenced the bar's takings for the next four weeks.

Shared history could also be considered alongside specific biographies. Consequently, it was useful to extend the concept of biography by considering how many people someone knew there in general, and how many people they knew there on a particular visit.

Lewis came in today. [He had been barred for over a year and had not been back since.] He heard Steve was going on holiday and decided to come in. Ha sat at the bar and I gave him a *Stella*, but when Steve saw him he told

Lewis to drink it and leave. [...] Alan came in from the garden and said hello to Lewis. Lewis darted over and left his drink at the bar with about an inch left at the bottom. Alan bought a pint of *Fosters* and the two of them went into the garden to join Alan's friends. [Half hour later] Alan came in and ordered a *Fosters* and a *Kronenbourg*. I knew that was for Lewis as all the others were drinking spirits so I said I would not serve him. Alan owned up and settled for the *Fosters*. Lewis sat out there for another hour then they all went to another pub.

Alternatively, on another occasion:

Marcus came out and asked us to come in as we were closing [We had just finished a group interview]. The five of us came in and stood by the door. Andy was sitting at the bar and when he saw me, he came over to us. I could not understand why at first, but he did not say hello to the others and only talked to me. [He had been to the pub on numerous occasions when the others were there.] Scott, Colin and I were talking but he just stood there and gave the occasional vague 'yeah'. When I turned to talk to Emma, I could see Andy tried to talk to Colin and Scott. Colin was talking back but Scott just had that 'whatever' look on his face. I realised the only reason Andy came over was because he knew me in that group. Colin was fine but Scott took one look at him, decided he was not 'cool' enough, and just 'blanked' him.

Knowing one person connected individuals to others, and potentially brought them closer to their network of friends. As I mentioned above, the amount of time people

spent there, and the level of interaction they engaged in, largely determined the range of people they could know in the future. So even when people came in on their own, by knowing one person meant they could join their social unit. Of course, this depended on whether their public biography was desirable, and their presence was accepted.

We had our Christmas party this afternoon. [...] It was quite a laugh and all of the regulars and the staff were there, except for Tom. [...] Clive was there again. He sat there for most of the afternoon and did not seem to talk to many of the people. I asked who he was and Leon dismissively said: 'that's Clive, Liz met him on the internet and brought him in here two months ago. He still won't get the hint; he still comes in here.'

Knowing even one person could legitimise people's presence. One of our principal customers, Leon, regularly brought his straight women friends to the bar. Samantha in particular had access to all of Leon's other friends and acquaintances. I never saw Samantha come to the bar alone, although when she was with Leon, she was always automatically invited for the lock-ins. The key issues here were mediation and integration. One person could mediate for another and help integrate them into a social unit. People acted as a kind of 'social referee' for the character of others. More importantly, knowing specific key people helped incorporate people into the broader social ecology of the bar.

For example, a group of young straight girls started to come to the bar. They first came in on a Saturday night and met a few people. They obviously enjoyed themselves as they came to be regular customers, coming in twice a week and staying for longer periods. However, on one night:

A young red haired girl came in with her familiar looking friend and asked for Larry [one of our barmen]. I said he was not in, and offered to find out when he would be working that week. I asked whether I could pass on a message. She said: "no, it isn't important, it's just that we talk to him when we come in here." [Later on that evening] I went up to them and mentioned Adam who I had seen with the other girl the previous week. The red haired girl sat up eagerly and quickly said: "yeah, we know Adam: we come in here with him."

The speed and keenness of the girl's reference to Adam and Larry seemed to indicate that the two men they mentioned, the two names they presented, were legitimate insiders. They connected the girls to the bar, in the social sense; being connected to them legitimised their presence as well. Knowing Adam and the Larry, and referencing them, brought them potentially closer to others inside the bar who knew them.

Understanding proximity relationships could not be limited to the examination of dyadic or triadic relations. It became necessary to consider extended networks of acquaintances, and the histories of those networks. Proximities were not only determined by how people got on with one person, but how they got on with others that the person knew. This raised three questions. First, what was the relationship that a person shared with others present in a particular situation? Second, what was the relationship that someone shared with people who were not there at that time, but are known to the people who were there? Lastly, what was the relationship between those other people whether they were there or not?

Because sexual encounters were often brief, and relations unstable, people were frequently excluded from certain social units. Even if not excluded, they were often distanced from individuals who were members of a particular social unit. The bar

environment was one of transitory acquaintances and associations where the lives of individuals intersected and social units overlapped. There were conflicts of interests, which meant individuals clashed and deflected each other. This was likely to increase the sense of proximity between them. Some of these were temporary disassociations while others became embedded in people's public biographies.

For example, Sam was close friend of Warren's; they had known each other for over a year and socialised a lot together as part of a larger network. Paul, who was an outsider to the group, started having a relationship/friendship with Sam. Warren did not like Paul because of series of misunderstandings, which then escalated into an intense dislike of each other. On one occasion Sam and Paul came in together and tried to join in with Warren and the rest of the group. Because of Warren's dislike towards Paul, he was automatically distanced from the whole unit. The tensions were visible and no one talked to Paul, who, along with Sam, had to sit on a neighbouring table because there was no room at their table. People were noticeably offish towards both of them and they left soon after. Furthermore, because Sam associated with Paul, he was effectively isolated from the group too. In the coming months, the relationship between Sam and Warren disintegrated and they stopped talking altogether.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, I have talked about issues of opportunity and obstruction. More, specifically, I discussed the temporal, personal, socio-political, socio-ecological and societal-structural factors that facilitated and encouraged interaction. Simultaneously, I have considered the obstructions that discouraged, or limited interaction. Some of these issues were very much context-specific, while other issues remain evident in other social milieus. By examining the micro-processes of social

interaction is it possible to begin to deconstruct the very essence of a cultural 'group'. I have used inverted commas because these small social dramas brought into question the very existence of a group. The continuous inauguration and dissolution of social units often defied the sort of coherence associated with a group.

These were individual agencies on intersecting vectors: a three-dimensional circuit board that kept rearranging itself. This circuit board existed as interrelated units and networks of units worked together (or against each other) to pursue certain localised aims. Ultimately, these may have culminated in the existence of a larger social entity, although individuals may have only contributed by undermining and rearranging existing networks of relationships. Parochial sets of social interests existed in microcosms, operating in relation to other individual interests and interest groups. Individuals and smaller units of people gathered in space and formed a 'greater whole'. Of course, the essence of this 'greater whole' was more difficult to comprehend. Any interpretation of this entity draws on a particular frame of reference. Whether these units existed as stable or coherent social entities, or as economic consumer groups for example, was debatable. The status of this entity was a matter for the observer as much as it was for those apparently associated with it (Bourdieu 1987).

Nevertheless, even the smallest and seemingly insignificant units in the circuitry were likely to share a symbiotic relationship with other elements. These relationships may not have been direct or even explicit. For a culture, or a subculture to exist, seemingly disconnected individuals must maintain some elements of the cultural group's values. This may seem like a seemingly naïve functional view of culture but it should not be read as such. This was as much about incoherence and conflict as about mutuality. However, even conflict and dysfunction rely on a dialogical relationship with some *other*. What I have sought to show here is how these dialogic relations existed at the micro-level.

The next step is to examine the relationship these micro-dramas and networks of relationships share with culturally produced myths. The following chapter examines the association between myths, social organisation and identity. In understanding proximity relationships, it was possible to examine the processes of social organisation without initially reifying a social group. The purpose of the next chapter is to demonstrate how notions of group formed *through* the production and consumption of hospitality. Simultaneously, the next chapter questions how the production and consumption of hospitality was inherently linked to carefully constructed notions of group.

Notes

¹ These three men always came together and I always referred to them as the three musketeers in my notes, even after I found out their names.

² I would contrast this to places such as nightclubs that have hot and cold zones, usually divided between dance spaces and other bar or 'chill-out' areas. As anyone who has ever tried to have a conversation in a nightclub will know, it is more likely that people will engage in conversations in the cooler (and quieter) spaces. Interaction in other spaces is more reliant on bodily expressions than language.

³ 'Chickens' are young boys, generally new to the scene, while 'scene queens' tend to be younger people new to the scene who adopt the more popular discourses of gay culture. Scene queens go out very often, frequenting trendy bars and clubs, wear fashionable clothing and tend to be overly camp in their mannerisms. Numerous people mentioned they were scene queens when they first 'came out' but have distanced themselves from those discourses as the novelty of the scene has decreased. 'muscle Marys' are men who invest heavily in their physical appearance by going to gyms; and 'butch lesbians', as a stereotypical image, are short haired masculine women who dress and act in very masculine way. Conversely, lipstick lesbians tend to dress and act in more 'traditionally' feminine ways. These terms are all part of a common lexicon.

⁴ I appreciate these are very imprecise and unscientific terms but these were the lay terms informants used to describe the context.

⁵ The construction of a social persona was a dialogic and interindividual act. Social actors projected their sense of self and other social actors interpreted these 'performances'.

Chapter 6 Myths

In considering the nature of proximity relations, the previous chapter began to identify the basis of association and the obligations of association. Within this chapter, I will continue to explore the themes of association through the notion of myths. These common understandings simultaneously form the basis of association and are the outcomes of that association. My aim here is to examine this reciprocal relationship between pre-existing myths (i.e., those understandings often constructed outside of the hospitality space) and myths produced within hospitality exchanges. This can then inform a more dynamic understanding of hospitality ecologies as networked relationships between agencies, ideologies, space and mobilised capital.

I have identified a number of myths that were frequently associated with the *Freelands*. More specifically, myths associated with the culture of the *Freelands*, and the people who consumed within. These myths are organised into three groups, which incorporate three broad themes. These are the *myths of commonality*, the *myths of safety*, and the *myths of play*. Within each of these three groups, there exist certain variations on the themes. As I argue, these have a direct relationship with individual positions, and to some extent, the motivations related to those positions.

The myths of commonality

Naturally, a consistent theme of most narratives was a sense of commonality with others in the bar, drawn from a shared sexuality. However, as the discussion on proximity illustrated, the idea of a common sexual identity was problematic, and it was more useful to examine the dialogic constructions of sexuality. There were more accepted defining principles of homosexuality (i.e., that it was positioned as an *other* to notions

of heterosexuality). However, there were numerous versions, or translations of this, which actors constructed during consumption. Some of these already circulated as complex secondary genres while others remained primary genres within private or parochial social orders.

When I asked people why they went to the *Freelands*, most simply answered that they came to: 'have a drink' and: 'have a laugh', obviously not very illuminating answers. Following this, I usually asked why they came to *this* bar, as opposed to other bars. Of course, geographic proximity was often cited, as this was literally their 'local'. But more importantly, there were social relations underpinning their consumption habits. This often worked at the broader discursive level. As one infrequent customer quite euphemistically noted: "I like to go to places where I have something in common with others." This implies that discourses of 'sexual dissidence' served as a common interest. However, most of the time commonality was rooted in something more concrete, i.e., 'I come to see my friends', which could work outside sexuality.

The division between commonality drawn from broader discursive notions of connectedness and commonality as specific connectedness to social units is important. In particular, it is worth elaborating on the notion of discursive commonality. Discursive commonality worked in number of ways, involving various levels of emotional commitment. Consequently, it appeared to have weaker and more intensive variations. Commonality, in the weak sense, operated as the quote above; people who were 'like them' (not-straight) came together to meet, socialise and consume together.¹ This loose association potentially linked a wide range of 'sexual dissidents'.²

Intensive expressions of discursive commonality relied on active and visible commitment toward ideological notions of sexual citizenship, mutuality and community (Richardson 1998, 2000a, 2000b). Participation in the activities of charities and interest-

groups were clear examples of this. For example, two regulars took part in a charity walk every year raising money for an AIDS charity.

Management could draw on common themes such as AIDS and sexual health in reinforcing these myths of commonality. Members of a local gay and lesbian charity organised 'packing parties' where customers helped make up safe-sex packs containing condoms and lubricant in return for drink tokens. Similarly, most of the managers held a party for 'World Aids Day', which was accompanied by promotional drinks, charity collections and raffles. These events served to reemphasise the potential commonality and mutual interest among consumers. These drew on visible discourses of common interest that emphasised the symbolic common themes around which neo-tribes could form.

However, when considering the micro-politics among consumers, it became apparent that ideologies of community (as a stable entity) disintegrated under the pressure of specific interpersonal and inter-unit tensions. Discourses of community were employed through purposive speech acts, particularly in moments of crisis or expressions of solidarity. For example, on the night that Brian (a gay man) won *Big Brother*, numerous people, including the DJ, declared that it was: 'great for the gay community that a gay man had won it!' As I noted in chapter 2, the strength or weakness of these myths changed in specific situations, according to the immediate objectives of the speakers. People aligned themselves to them and repeated common terms such as 'community' when the moment suited it. Although, when I questioned them later, often in more sober contexts, they denied the existence of a community because of the 'bitchiness', 'backstabbing' and 'two-facedness'. The shift from existential to normative *communitas* failed to materialise.

These notions of community were especially tested following a specific incident, which different people perceived in contradictory ways. One of the regulars, Frank, started to

bring his cousins to the bar, one of whom was an outspoken woman in her 30s. On one weeknight, Frank came in with his older homophobic brother, his cousins, and some of their friends. When going to the toilet one of the young regulars (Jamie) made a comment about the woman, describing her as a 'bottle-blond'. She heard the comment and started to argue with Jamie. Others tried to diffuse the situation but the argument became more heated and Frank's older brother and his two friends came over. Another regular, Mick, tried to calm the situation, at which point the three men attacked him, dragging him into the toilet where he was severely beaten. The manager locked the door that connected the bar to the back area and stayed there instead of breaking up the fight. There were conflicting stories as to what happened next. Steve (the manager) claimed he called the police, but others said he called the owner of the bar who told him not to call the police. Steve told me the police phoned back 20 minutes later and asked whether he still required their assistance. By this time the bar had emptied out, and they closed up at around 10pm. Steve was severely criticised for not taking more of an active role, as were the police who then gave the bar a direct emergency number in case of another incident.

The reactions to this incident reflected the fragile nature of community and communal sentiment. Shortly afterwards, during an interview, I asked Warren whether he thought there was a sense of community at the Freelands. His response was succinct:

No! You know there was that fight a couple of months ago? It proved that there is no sense of unity or togetherness. There were seven straight people there that wanted to cause a fight. As a gay community I think we should have stood up and said what the fuck do you think... [Pause]. Who the hell do you think you are? We didn't. We got all frightened and scuttled away. What we should have done is say: 'there's more of us, this is our pub!' It

didn't happen. There were kids running out terrified. Where was the landlord? He locked the door and hid out the back. Why wasn't he there?

It was interesting to note that Colin, who was an acquaintance of Warren, shared the same attitude. He passionately declared that it was not right that others had let that happen and that: 'we should look after our own.' For others, like Joyce, this incident signified a strong sense of community. It is important to note that Joyce was an older lesbian who was not associated with Warren, or his network of friends. When she talked about the same incident, she said:

When Mick, you know when Frank and his family started on him? And everyone was like: 'if you want us down there we will come down there!' Me, Anna, and she was like: 'yeah I'm there!' I think everyone sticks together. Whether it be a female getting their head kicked in or a male, everyone would just pile in. I think everyone looks after themselves. We all look after each other in here. I know if I were in trouble, there is quite a few people I could turn to in here. Like a fighting trouble, there is quite a few people that I could turn to in here.

Joyce said, as soon as she heard what happened, she phoned Jamie straight away and reassured him of her support. Jamie and Mick were nervous about going to the bar in case Frank or any of his family came in, so as a gesture of friendship and solidarity, Joyce said she would come with them. Others such as Daniel (Warren's boyfriend) were outraged this happened and threatened Steve with a boycott if he allowed Frank to drink at the bar. As a result, Steve barred Frank.

The notion of community did not necessarily function as a coherent ideology although there was a sense of collective interest. Networks of support existed where a sense of proximity among individuals encouraged emotional commitment towards each other.

The myths of safety

The historical relationship between sexual dissidents, myths of safety and commercial hospitality spaces is well-established (David 1997, Jivani 1997, Mort 1996). Consequently, all contemporary productions of dissident space are potentially loaded with political and emotional connotations; they already draw on a rich mythological tradition – the need for ‘safe space’.

Myths of safety within the *Freelands* had a number of variations and often had a strong gender and sexual element to them. This meant safety for straight or gay women was slightly different to the safety men discussed. I have approached the myths of safety and play through the interconnected ideals of *freedom from/freedom to*, which relate to issues of sheltering and allowance. For both gay men and women the bar acted as safe space, sheltering them from surveillance and the threat of homophobic violence. When I asked straight females why they came to the bar they usually responded with the same faithful phrase: ‘you don’t get any hassle in here.’ Women contrasted the culture of the bar with other male-oriented heterosexual places.

Skeggs (1999) notions of visibility and invisibility are particularly useful in explaining these attitudes. Skeggs argued that in ‘straight’ environments women are visible and continually subjected to the male heterosexual gaze. Within gay spaces, they become invisible in the sense that they do not encounter the same sexualised objectification; or so the myth goes.

Liz came into bar at around 9. [Greg told me earlier that Liz had organised a barbeque at her house and she finally got together with a man she had been keeping in contact with.] Everyone jeered and clapped her when she arrived and started making comments right away. When she started to talk about 'coming to the pub' James and Greg immediately started to make jokes about orgasms and the number of times she had 'cum' that night. When she asked for a glass of water, they asked if it was to get the taste of his cum out of her mouth. She was embarrassed but seemed to take it in her stride. [This went on for most of the evening] When Liz left, she kissed Greg and he loudly commented that he could: 'smell his cock on her breath.'

The culture of surveillance in the bar was always evident. After all, it was a parochial space, both culturally and spatially. Nevertheless, overt sexual references were not perceived to be the same kind of male aggression.

There were countless occasions where straight women had their breast openly fondled, or commented on as part of some joke or sexual reference by their gay male friends. Samantha was a prime example and I asked her whether she minded this. She said Leon (her gay friend) had: 'seen her naked' and: 'this was nothing.' Samantha and Liz usually just rolled their eyes and often commented on gay men's perpetual fascination with breasts, usually blaming their immaturity. They seemed surprisingly casual about these contacts although they slapped their friends' hands when they were not in the mood for their antics.

The issue was one of perceived motivation and gratification. More often than not, women laughed along, whereas the same actions in a straight environment would be much more likely to provoke objections. Naturally, this sort of behaviour was mostly done among friends and depended on the kinds of rapport between people.

Nevertheless, the fact remained that because these gestures were not seen as aggressive invasions of privacy for the purpose of sexual gratification, they were not seen as improprieties. These acts were performed openly, which indicated that women did not feel these transgressions tainted their self-image of respectability. I would question how others would perceive men openly fondling a woman's breasts in a 'straight' environment. This reflected liberation from gender norms and expectations – transgressions that were potentially dangerous outside of such parochial space (Skeggs 1999). However, liberation was specifically reliant on the intersection of firmly rooted commonalities and the *enacted* character of a specific kind of hospitable space.

[A Scottish man had been in the bar for most of the afternoon with two younger women. An older straight-looking couple were sitting at the front table next to the door and the young man joined them.] All I heard was a sudden loud shrill and when I turned around the woman at front table had stood up and was freaking out at the young man. She kept swearing at him saying: 'what the hell do think you are doing grabbing my arse?!' At first, the man tried to laugh it off by saying he was: 'just joking', but that just made her even madder. The older man who was with the woman kept telling him to: 'leave it.' The young man kept apologising and backing away. He went back to the bar looking embarrassed. [...] He and the two girls left after a few minutes.

Hospitality ecologies, as representations of space, in this case, as liberated safe space, only exist as *lived representational spaces*. In other words, the values of place-myths were situationally reified when they were repeatedly performed by its producers and consumers, or not. As these performances were withheld, the place-myths could only

function within the cognitive realm (i.e., for those who still believed space was of a certain kind), or as representations of space.

This tenuous relationship between representations and lived practices was also evident in a second recurring theme within the overall myths of safety: the myths of peace. All my informants, male and female, gay and straight, young and old emphasised this aspect of the bar's culture. Such myths of peace often appear implicitly within hospitality spaces, although in this case, directly extended from myths of togetherness and commonality.

It seems obvious to conclude that people who go to licensed establishments view it as natural that they will not be beaten up or abused. However, for gay (or at least non-straight) consumers, in a delineated 'gay-space', these myths of safety are implicitly associated with the myths of togetherness. Their collective presence, and the recognised legitimacy of their presence, implies that they will be safe there from harm. No one has to state explicitly that violence and the potential threats of violence are excluded. I must admit, this is a belief that I held myself, and cannot deny openly admitting to when people asked me why I started to come to the bar in the first place.

As I noted in chapter 3, the town and its inhabitants had a stable cultural mentality projected over it. Besides being seen as a very middle-class, white area, it was viewed as a very violent town, especially at nights. In contrast, everyone I talked to considered the *Freelands* to be non-violent space. Fights amongst regulars were rare, and the few incidents among gay men were jokingly dismissed as 'handbags at twenty paces'. Even an incident where Dillon's ex boyfriend threw a glass at him across the bar was treated by most people as 'melodrama'. Interpersonal tensions, and violence which emerged as a result, were not seen as threatening, whereas homophobic comments or threats from 'outsiders' were seen as liable to jeopardise the social order.

As with the other variations of the myths of safety, myths of peace remained cognitive and discursive until challenged; they were continually reified until they were contested. When the myths of peace were negated (as the incident with Frank and his family exemplified), the immediate and performed nature of lived space overruled all the representational practices. However, what was important to consider was how perceptions of threat, risk and transgression were negotiated among hosts and guests. The incident with the young man throwing the glass was not seen to challenge the myths of peace in the same way. No one left that night or threatened to boycott the bar if he was not barred. Of course, Steve excluded and barred the young man, but the resonance of this incident remained negligible. This was catalogued, to some extent, as behavioural anomalies within the bounds of 'normal trouble' (Cavan 1966), which implied certain judgemental elasticities granted to potential insiders. This is something I will come back to in later chapters.

For those 'producing space' appropriately, freedom from potentially critical surveillance and the threat of violence meant they had the freedom to engage in activities that were not possible outside such private or parochial space. People were aware of the potentially liberating character of the place; they saw it as a potentially liminal space where certain cultural norms could be inverted or challenged. Of course, the extent to which this liminality or freedom was real, is debateable. As I argue in chapter 7, the performative implies prescription and codification as much as individuality and creativity.

The myths of play

The myth of play had a number of variations. They had a direct link to both discursive and rooted notions of commonality, as well as specific motivations and expected

gratifications. Straight women, both young and old continually told me that gay bars were: 'so friendly.' One young girl said: "gay men are the friendliest and nicest people on earth." These declarations drew from an already rich mythology that equated gay consumption (read as gay male) with hedonism and liberated spaces (see Garratt 1998 for a lengthy account).

It was a really slow night and I was expecting to have an early night. Four women came, all in their late 30s. They started drinking spirits and invited us to have a drink with them. [...] They asked to change the music and we gave them a few of our CDs to look through. They asked us to play 80s music, especially high-energy music like the *Weather Girls*' 'It's Raining Men'. Joanne kept telling me how she loved gay places and how she had been going to gay clubs since she was 17. [...] Darren was at the bar next to the women and started talking to Joanne when the subject of music came up. [...] They all started dancing at the bar and two of the women climbed up the pole [with a small table attached] and started pole dancing. That is until one of them pulled the light off. Steve didn't seem too bothered. [...] Darren had got up and was dancing too. Even Ken was dancing. I had never seen him dancing before; I was shocked to see him doing the running man! He was quite good. [...] I left just before 2am.

These were the myths of liminality and the orgy, or more precisely, orgiastic consumption. Within the *Freelands*, just as in the *Temple* (chapter 7), 'hosts' strategically employed discourses of the orgy by playing particular genres of music that were coupled to specific types of social action.

These orgiastic and performative qualities of space became particularly evident during parties and events. Parties were always expected to go on 'after hours' and people made the effort to come to them even when they were not regulars during the week. The bar was usually decorated, and many of events were themed. The extract below was from 'School Disco Night':

Walking up to the *Freelands* we heard the dance music blasting out. Girls were walking in and out to use their mobile phones and every time the door opened the noise suddenly poured into the street. Just before I went in I unzipped my top to show my shirt and tie. When we walked in I was surprised at how many people were dressed up. The bar was full of pigtailed *Brittany Spears* look-alikes and most of the younger men had white shirts and their old school ties on. [...] They played 'Los Ketchup' by *Los Ketchup* and I could see Dean, Nathan and their girlfriends doing synchronised dance moves at the back of the bar. I never knew this song had its own dance steps. [Having seen the music video, I now realise they were repeating the pop group's routines] 'Clap your hands' by *Steps* got the same result. [...] Tom played 'YMCA' by the *Village People* and 90% of the people in the bar simultaneously performed the routine. They pulled us into the middle of the bar and there was no way to avoid joining in. This really was infectious and I saw loads of supposedly conservative people dancing. I even saw the older men at the bar wiggle about in their chairs doing the arm movements. All I could see were people laughing around me. It was really energising. This obviously went down well as Tom put on 'The Time-warp' from the *Rocky Horror Picture Show*. I tried to walk off feigning tiredness but I was dragged back again to the middle of the bar where everyone was

standing in a circle doing the dance moves. [...] Tom played both the songs again later on that night [and he played these songs after that during many of the parties].

The consumers were highly aware of each other, and intensely engaged in mutual acts of consumption. These were moments when the spirit of Turner's spontaneous communitas were realised (or reified). Seeing this carnivalesque consumption for the first time was usually a great novelty to new people. As a result, the bar and its culture must have seemed very sociable and playful.

On party nights, many of the regulars brought in groups of friends. Naturally, these new guests saw everyone visibly enjoying themselves, and people were far more likely to move around and interact, even with strangers. Most customers who brought friends or acquaintances knew others in the bar already and new people were constantly introduced to existing acquaintances. Some people did not even need to be introduced as regulars such as Dillon would just come and talk to them.

During parties and weekend events, there was an apparent acceleration of interaction, participation and consumption. The spectacular performances of selves, the potential for social interaction, the active realisation of extended networks of associations, and the excessive consumption of the emotional and physical experience, intensified.

Because of these perceptions, returning customers frequently tried to project the same emotion on to the space, even on quiet weekday evenings. For example, new customers saw the regulars drink our house cocktails, which were lethal mixtures of coloured alcopops and spirits. They then enthusiastically bought them for their other friends who they brought in the following week. These cocktails (the 'Grandma' and 'Fifi' specials) were invented by some of the regulars and the managers, and not advertised. Regulars

and other 'knowledgeable' people encouraged new people to try them, often with amusing results.

Certain people acted as trigger agents by continuing these rituals and passing them on to others. Darren constantly drank these cocktails; he was the one that actually showed me how to make them when I started working there. When he brought acquaintances or new partners into the bar, he frequently asked for his 'usual'. These were visible displays of his connectedness and principal status; his unique knowledge was an expression of subcultural and social capital. This also reflected the performative elements of a dialogic social memory as rituals were enacted, ensuring their survival. After Fifi and Steve left, and Darren stopped coming to the bar, people stopped drinking these cocktails. Forgetting, in the social sense, was the simply result of non-committal and the absence of performance.

There was also a voyeuristic element to this spectacular orgiastic consumption. People could come in and watch all this go on around them although they may not have participated actively. Watching the spectacle of play was another way people consumed the experience and engaged with the myths of play. Arguably, this notion of 'engagement' (see chapter 2) also renegotiated the supposed passivity of those present, even when they were only watching:

Dillon was dancing in the middle of the bar tonight. When a few people started cheering him on, he brought a chair into the middle of the bar and started to perform a 'sexy' dance routine for them. Most people laughed and he kept doing this for another five minutes. He then went around apologising for his behaviour to everyone explaining how he: 'wasn't like this usually.' Within about five minutes he was doing it again.

Watching reflected an active engagement with Dillon's performance. Consequently, all those watching, including me, played an active role in creating that moment. Because Dillon saw he was being watched, he amplified and exaggerated his performance to accommodate his audience. Watching, in this sense, was not a neutral or passive act.

It is interesting to note that the implications of watching were directly determined by your perceived biographical profile. For example, an older straight man often came in, sometimes on his own, or sometimes with his partner, and watched the goings on in the bar. Some of the regulars saw this as intrusive voyeurism. As Karen commented: "[_____] thinks: 'oh I'll go and watch the circus tonight, I'll watch the freaks!'" This was something he openly admitted to when asked. Moreover, beyond looking, the man was very lecherous; often putting his arms around them, which Karen and others disliked. Understandably, there were numerous reasons for why he was distanced from Karen and her friends. His perceived motivations, social position and his lack of effective social capital subsequently influenced the way his actions were interpreted. He could engage with the spectacle, but beyond watching, his involvement was limited.

What is important to highlight is how people 'bought into' the myths of friendliness and play as part of their own self-amusement. This was the process of interpellation, where the ideological grounds for the consumption experience, in this case the orgiastic element, called out to individuals to participate. I appreciate that consumption was very much an existential and sensory or bodily experience, which cannot be reduced to ideologies alone. The production and consumption of hospitality ecologies were very much constructed through Lefebvre's representational (lived) spaces. However, experience of this production and consumption was linked to broader representations of space and the spatial practices of organised capital. Therefore, while the experience of hospitality consumption may have been situational and orgiastic, the knowledge and capital bound up in its construction was located beyond its immediacy.

Just as in other commercial hospitality venues, the *Freelands'* management sought to create an image of the bar as a ludic environment. The bar operators used specific cultural practices (playing certain types of music and encouraging certain patterns of behaviour) to reinforce certain discourses of gay culture. These discourses manifested themselves in (spectacular) visual forms, which served to reinforce the myths of play. In effect, the host was attempting to create the grounds for the existence of ideological *communitas* through purposive semiotic displays and the management of profanity. This 'management' referred to both hosts and guests in their performances of selves. In constructing the commercial hospitality space, the hosts helped to realise symbolic common grounds where consumers could gather to form more or less consistent networks or social units.

The ludic was also about experimentation, although this did not mean rules and norms did not exist. However, the perceived culture of the bar meant the possibility for subversion and transformation was a lot more feasible. Treating play in terms of liminality, which the space potentially allowed, helped to understand the way people experimented with sexual identification. Men (and it was mostly men) who lived straight lives came in and experimented with other sexual identities, albeit temporarily. Therefore, the myths of play were partly about sociality, but also about hedonism, escape, experimentation and symbolic inversions. The potential surveillance and the social controls of the outside world could be suspended, or at least challenged, within the bar. This meant there was the freedom to engage in these activities. The myths of play, then, directly fed off the myths of commonality and safety. Meanwhile, in a reciprocal way, play offered people the opportunities to interact. This potentially brought them into closer proximity to each other as they now shared common experiences. Naturally, not all meetings were positive and proximity was always a

negotiated relationship. Nevertheless, these encounters and the shared narratives about the myths of play informed these relationships.

These notions of liminality and escape were of course problematic. The usefulness of liminality was limited because certain internalised conditioning factors, which may be called the 'reified habitus', were difficult to escape. For closeted men, it was often difficult to switch from a straight to a gay 'repertoire'. The tensions arising from their 'dual-lives' often meant they could not relax or engage with others easily. Additionally, they were often not familiar with specific 'restricted codes' of interaction, or integrated into social units.

Consequently, it is problematic to associate liminality with states of anti-structure and 'liberation'. Turner's liminoid activities associated with contemporary leisure activities are illusory forms of consumption. In escaping one set of constraints, (which is itself problematic to assume) participants were confronted with alternative limitations. Their opportunities to consume the 'hospitality experience', or to articulate dissident sexual identities, were restricted. These are both issues will I return to in the next two chapters.

The construction and consumption of images and myths

The following section examines the production and consumption of place-images. I intend to demonstrate how frequently reoccurring sets of discrete meanings associated with a place, consolidated to form place-myths. As before, the critical theme remains the tenuous relationship between common understandings operating external to hospitality space and those produced and consumed within hospitality ecologies. More specifically, I intend to demonstrate how 'external myths' were appropriated and reproduced within space through semiotic and performative displays.

Objects-as-signs

Objects, as signs, operated in three ways: 'directly', 'referentially' or 'reflectively'. Posters and signs that used the term 'gay' for example worked *directly* in communicating a set of themes about the *Freelands*. *Referential* objects used specific knowledge of cultural norms and institutions; they referred to the meaning of these norms and institutions as a way to communicate cultural themes. *Reflective* objects did not draw on specific knowledge but suggested, implied or indicated certain moral codes or aesthetic values through specific semiotic forms. These 'suggestions' could then be used to understand the culture of space.

The rainbow flag for example is a globally used signifier that represents gay solidarity and identity. It operated referentially in drawing on the discourses of community. The bar had a small rainbow sticker in the window and a large flag was visibly displayed on the wall. The first set of managers hung the rainbow flag outside the bar but stopped this because it attracted attention.

The flag in itself already presented three important considerations. First, it drew on historically established discourses of commonality and gay pride. Operating indexically, it referred to discourses of social visibility (Skeggs 1999). Second, the flag (as signal) only became a sign for those who read it as such, and were equipped with the appropriate knowledge. The third point concerns a more specific problem of identification. The rainbow flag represents a struggle and remains a potent and readily accessible symbol of solidarity among sexual dissidents. However, not everyone identified with this political statement of identity. The following is an extract from an interview with two gay men in their early 20s, Dean and Nathan:

Dean: One thing I can't stand about this place is the flag thing going on. [...]

It bothers me!

Peter: Why?

Dean: There is this big thing about *Mardi Gras*; it used to be called *Pride* and how it's changed now and how it's seen. *Pride* is originally like we are proud and celebrating...

Homosexuality (someone whispers).

Dean: Now *Mardi Gras* is a big gay event where people can go. The imagery, 'pride', was originally the imagery of the flag; they need to change it because pride doesn't mean the same thing it used to mean. It is an older thing now.

Nathan: Change with the time; we are the new generation.

David: *Geri Halliwell!*

Nathan: There was the old school gay. We are the new school. The old school were very leather queeny, very fancy young queens walking around wearing strap ons with leather and stuff. Back dark rooms, places like *Fist* and stuff.

Dean: The older generation are the ones that made this stand for gay rights. They laid foundations I would say. And now, I look back and the people younger than us now are coming out at school. It's come on from people who couldn't talk about homosexuality, to people that were doing it and there are people who are just dealing with it.

Nathan: They are being cool, they are gay.

Polyvocality, the past 'voices' apparent in a contemporary utterance, was very much evident here. The flag (as utterance) embodies the voices of past struggles: the politically charged sentiment, which no longer has the same meaning as it once did. For these young men the flag did not have the same connotative value, and therefore, did not necessarily occupy the same position in a 'cultural index' (Douglas 1973, 1996). This not to say emerging generations do not face struggles for social and political space. However, the conditions under which these battles are fought have changed. These were examples of younger people who looked to more subtle expressions of gay identity. 'Stylish' bars, with large windows, DJs, expensive cocktails and 'beautiful', socially-mobile clientele were more representative of their lifestyle, or at least the kind of lifestyles they identified with.

Other examples of referential signs were the charity organisations such as *The Terrence Higgins Trust* (an AIDS related charity) and *The Lighthouse* (a local gay and lesbian group) which had collection boxes at the bar. Both had posters advertising their work, and *The Lighthouse* had certificates thanking customers for their help in fundraising. Of course, *The Terrence Higgins Trust* may not have been revealing in itself, but the *The Lighthouse* was, to those who knew it was a gay and lesbian support group.

Other signs operated directly such as the poster Jill put up that read: 'this is a gay friendly bar so please respect it.' Similarly, there were posters with anti-homophobic messages issued by the police, and other informative posters about gay organisations and events in the area. The bar held copies of free gay papers. These were mostly male oriented ones such as *QX* or *Boyz*, but also the *Pink Paper*, which has a broader target readership. By 2002, we also began stocking copies of *G3*, a magazine aimed at the young urban lesbian. When viewed up close, even the most naïve of observers would realise they were magazines for a lesbian/gay audience and there for a reason.

Objects that operated reflectively tended to be the more playful examples of visual display. The previous managers, before Steve, put up a number of pictures of naked athletic men on the walls, mostly 'artistic' black and white prints. One picture was of a male hand holding his crotch and captioned: 'safer sex'. Steve artistically reworked an American pedestrian signal so instead of flashing 'walk'/'don't walk' it read 'wank'/'don't wank', which should have been less than subtle to the viewer. These conscious acts of display used semiotic references to the sexualised or aesthetically objectified body; they operated reflectively as they implicitly, and explicitly, indicated a culture of allowance. They reflected certain moral standards, or perhaps, more specifically, the abandonment of some moral values. The objectification of the male body, in all these semiotic forms, helped to construct the image of a specific type of cultural nexus. In effect, the management were constructing a spatialised culture; the place-image was of a location where overt displays of sexual reference were encouraged and celebrated.

Objects served to project a place-image as 'gay', drawing on the myths of commonality, safety and play. Most of these were crude but reasonably effective means of communication, at least to those who were aware of them. This issue of awareness is something I will return to later in this chapter. For now, it is useful to discuss other

groups of signifiers that drew on other sets of genres and cultural or subcultural discourses.

Music was at once the most obvious of signals, but at the same time a relatively subtle carrier of signs. The music policy, simultaneously represented the attitude of the bar manager and the perceived characteristics of the bar's consumers. The managers chose music that he or she assumed the customers wanted to hear. I must reemphasise that the bar had a jukebox, which meant customers could decide what kind of music was played. Furthermore, the open channels of communication between staff and the patrons meant customers had considerable input in the music policy. However, for the moment, I intend to concentrate on the general music policy of the bar as it contributed to the creation of the place-image. More importantly, how music drew on culturally specific types of knowledge to achieve this.

The music in the bar tended to be of four main varieties. Contemporary popular music (mostly vocal dance, songs from *Madonna* or *Kylie* which had been given a dance remix); contemporary 'street soul', or 'R&B' from bands such as *Destiny's Child*; harder club oriented tracks (some purely instrumental but most with some synthesised vocals); or, popular rock from the 80s such as *A-ha*. The musical policy was utilitarian in offering consumable music that the majority of people would appreciate. Any real deviations from these mainstream styles were often disapproved of, especially if these deviations were noticeable or continuous. For example, it was acceptable to play 'Take on me' by *A-ha* – one the groups most famous and catchy songs from the 80s. However, to play the entire album was excessive. People often frowned on harder rock, or R&B and dance music that was not popular or recognisable. Playing this kind of music usually met with complaints from either the customers or the manager.

It is problematic to say that the bar played 'gay music' as there was, effectively, no such thing. However, on a number of occasions I experimented with 80s rock, soul, funk,

jazz or harder electronic music. These were usually described as: 'not gay enough', 'too boring', 'too depressive', 'too hard', or 'too repetitive'. 'Gay music' was perhaps best embodied by bands such as *Steps* who produced uplifting, vocal, dance-oriented popular music. This was of course an oversimplification. This kind of music represented a popularised and somewhat clichéd type of 'high-camp' gay identity.

The key word here is popularised. These types of bands were branded, often called 'manufactured' pop groups. They were formed as record producers put together a group of young, attractive girls and boys, who received contracts from large record companies. Producing highly consumable popular music, these bands received a great deal of publicity and marketing exposure. These were bands with a huge gay (again, read as gay male) following. They often played in venues such as *G.A.Y.*, which was a popular Saturday night event that invested heavily in self-promotion.

Steve often played (and encouraged the DJ to play) vocal, dance-oriented, uplifting music very loudly in the evenings and at weekends. By Steve's own admission, this was to create an uplifting atmosphere and to make the place seem lively. As with the flag, this kind of music was a widely accepted signifier of a gay identity. However, in this case, the signifier was not filled with voices of past struggles, but echoed voices of amusement. The music reflected rituals of play associated with hedonism, consumption and liminality.

Just as with the flag, music, as signifier of social identity, represented positions on a social topography (Frith 1996a, 1996b). People took up a relationship with these positions in terms of identification (i.e., association, disassociation or of course ambivalence). Ambivalence was frequently the case with older consumers and those not associated with the contemporary 'scene' who often did not take an obvious position or even notice these apparent acts of signification.

In contrast, Danni was a good example of how music served as a broader signifier of cultural values with hospitality ecologies. I met Danni when he came into the bar one quiet afternoon and we started talking. He was in his early 20s and gay, but said he strongly disliked: 'shit gay music.' Danni was a dedicated follower of alternative rock bands such as *Rage Against the Machine* and was disappointed that few gay places catered to his tastes. He said if he wanted to go to gay places, he had to endure the sort of popular music discussed above. To Danni, this was more than about music; this was about the sort of subcultural lifestyle genres associated with specific sorts of music. This is what he said about a visit to a popular gay bar in London: "I walked in with long hair, jeans and a leather jacket and they told me that I was in the wrong pub; they asked if I was looking for the pub next door." I am not sure whether they really told him to leave or not. However, the truth of his narrative was not the key issue. The point was that he *felt* that his style, the styles he identified with, clashed with those of his surroundings. For Danni, music was an aural embodiment of these conflicting styles, and reflected the type of clientele whose patronage was encouraged. The music was synonymous with the moral and aesthetic values the clientele maintained and displayed through their clothing and actions. His narrative account illustrated how conflicting styles and tastes effectively acted as a boundary.

There was consensus among my informants that the music in the bar appealed to a young male gay audience. This served to distance some of the female clientele, and the older clientele, especially those who did not associate themselves with this sort of music, or lifestyle. A large number of lesbian customers did not like this music. They did not like the type of gay identity it embodied; or for that matter, the type of gay culture it appeared to encourage. The following is an excerpt from a conversation with two lesbian women, who were regulars at one time:

Peter: What about music, what sort of music do they play in there?

Nicola: Cheesy pop.

Karen: They play the same music in every single pub I go to.

Peter: In every straight pub or gay pub?

Karen: Oh no not a straight pub. In a pub you'll listen to *Oasis*, *Texas*, a wide range...

Nicola: Good music.

Karen: You go into the *Freelands*, *Whytes*, *Coast*, it's all 'dud dud', I can't stand it. It's like, why can't they make one night of old music.

Nicola: Proper music, with actual instruments and singers.

Karen: It is not gay enough [for other people]. We are being stereotyped by the music. I don't listen to *Billie Piper*...

Nicola: It's like 11 year old music and gay music go hand in hand.

Peter: I put on jazz funk music...

Karen: If you put that on in a lesbian bar you would be loved.

The metonymic properties of music as a marketing communication tool were very much evident. The management utilised a narrow range of musical genres, commonly perceived as 'gay', to engage a heterogeneous consuming audience. On the one level, it was very specific in aiming at a young, gay male clientele. However, management rather crudely used the same message to communicate cultural values to broader and more diverse consumer segments, whose only association was their sexual dissidence. These reflect the management's efforts to construct and communicate a specific set of place-images. As such, these were relatively crude acts of signification.

Cultural identity was reflected in numerous other subtle cultural objects and actions. For example, Nicola came to the bar on one occasion with Darren and said: "you can tell that this is a gay bar by the number of 'poofy' drinks there are in the fridge, only a gay bar would have this many flavours of Bacardi Breezer. Gay men and lesbians are 'alright', they drink normal drinks. It is the queens that drink all these funny drinks." Steve echoed this sentiment and often said: 'poofs love these drinks.' He claimed this was the reason he constantly introduced new varieties of colourful alcopops.

However, drinks in themselves did not convey a type of sexuality or a position of social identity. Obviously, social actors projected these status values onto objects. When drinks were juxtaposed alongside other objects such as flags, posters and magazines, they began to have *intensified meanings*. In this social context, the management used these objects along with specific genres of music, to signify a relatively coherent set of place-images. Consequently, continually reasserted set of images (guided perceptions) manifested themselves as place-myths (spatialised common understandings).

These conscious strategies of display reflected one important part of the process of *inducement*. Inducement involved subtle processes of enticement where the hosts attempted to 'guide' the perceptions of those engaging with hospitality ecologies. The object-centred mnemonic strategies acted as the 'prostheses' that informed the

collective or dialogic memory (Lury 1998). The production of semiotic realities was simultaneously used to produce social orders and to inform perceptions of those social orders. This then served to produce, and reproduce increasingly coherent versions of the place-myths.

The usefulness of this approach to hospitality ecologies was that it connected the inhuman to the human so objects were not detached from their cultural contexts. Furthermore, this illustrated the way knowledge was bound up in the inhuman, but subsequently mobilised through the human. With this in mind, the following sections examine the role of human agency as it intersected with semiotic strategies.

The consumer as subject matter and subject maker

Ultimately, the key elements in the construction of place-images (and place-myths) were people. This of course refers to the social actors inhabiting space, and those outside in a position to observe and comment on space. When I asked how people knew, or would know this was a gay bar, most immediately pointed to the people.

Individuals had the power to transform their surroundings, partly through physical acts, although perceptions of space were essentially cognitive transformations. People often projected attitudes, or emotional states, and their versions of cultural identity onto a space. This projection was not always an individual act; in fact, I would argue that it was very much a dialogic, social process. It was not so much what one individual might have been doing, or the objects that he or she was displaying. Those watching him or her may have assumed that the cultural ideals they embodied reflected the culture of the space as a whole. Darren for example made a clear association between certain places and types of people.

Heaven is like 'Muscle Mary', *G.A.Y.* is definitely 'Attitudes' and 'scene-queens'. [...] *Ku bar* is full of 'rent-boys' and old men looking for 'rent-boys'. *Manto*: pretentious and up it's own arse. 'Drug addicts', they always end up at *Trade* after *G.A.Y.* .

Of course, this was nothing new, or limited to lesbian and gay consumers. What was interesting was the process of this appropriation, designation and indexing. Informants regularly gave examples where the visible occupation of space led to a perceived appropriation and transformation of its culture. Daniel remarked that when he heard the *Freelands* being referred to as the town's 'first gay bar' he laughed and said: 'it was the second.' He referred to another pub, *The Crescent*, as the town's: 'original gay bar':

When we moved to Compton we didn't know anybody who was gay. We kept ourselves to ourselves. We came here to this pub [*The Crescent*]. This is our local. We have never made a secret of it. The landlord had always been very helpful and the staff and the customers as well. This was *our* pub.

This was not an issue.

In a similar way, Nathan and Thomas had previously worked at *Brookes*: a 'trendy' bar in the centre of Compton, which they said was: 'Compton's first gay bar.' On Thursday nights, they used to get so many gay people coming to *Brookes* they informally referred to it as: 'gay night.' Even the town's gay and lesbian youth group went there regularly on Thursdays. This was an informal understanding although their visibility was apparent. Nathan and Dean both said they got: 'a few comments', and: 'dirty looks', but because they worked there, their presence was legitimised, which then extended to others in the bar.

Three points must be made here. First, the notion of legitimate presence can be read here as a minimal tolerance as opposed to widespread acceptance. Having gay clientele was not an overtly celebrated or advertised part of *Brookes'* place-image. It was an informal arrangement that arose out of physical visibility and the mobilisation of social capital. As chapter 7 illustrates, being in close proximity with the owners/managers legitimised individuals' presence, and his or her perceived sense of authority within space.

Second, tolerance on the management's part was likely to be linked to economic visibility and the mobilisation of economic capital. In other words, because they represented a source of income, their presence was accepted by the bar's operators. Consequently, because their presence was legitimised by the managers, other consumers were inclined to adopt the same position.

Third, this visibility was limited to gay male visibility, which did not necessarily create the same expressive space for lesbian consumers. This may also be understood in terms of an economic and physical invisibility; it reflected an inability or unwillingness to mobilise appropriate forms of economic and social capital. The lack of collective representations, or conspicuous consumption, undermined the possibility of a similar lesbian space.

Again, this is not limited to lesbian consumers and reflects the universality of Lefebvre's spatial dialectic. The appropriation or transformation of representational space is directly dependent on representations of space and spatial practices. Arguably, the production of a social ecology conducive to particular kinds of private and social hospitality exchanges is directly dependant on three elements: a sense of mutual consciousness, appropriate proximity relations, and the mobilisation of resources that are transformable into effective practices of power.

The contexts I have been discussing were based on an ideological consciousness around sexual dissidence. The resources partly referred to social capital in the form of appropriate networks of people that either identified with this ideological consciousness or, at least, shared appropriate proximity relations. More importantly, social capital was not restricted to networks of guests but extended to guests and hosts. Again, this was drawn from appropriate proximity relations.

Resources also referred to economic capital, which often complemented or actually replaced shared ideologies or proximity relations. Beyond the immediate contexts, this is particularly the case in other commercial hospitality spaces where empathy among hosts and guests is negated in favour of economic exchanges. However, the formula remains the same: economic resources are transformed into effective bases power, where guests who can mobilise appropriate economic capital, have greater opportunities to (re)produce *their* versions of hospitality ecologies.

Hospitality ecologies become realisable within this dialectic where shared knowledges and capabilities converge to form some ephemeral totality. The final section considers the way particular culturally specific knowledges and capabilities intersected to form place-images. In keeping with the transactional character of the research, the aim was not to compile taxonomies of spatial types. Instead, the emphasis was placed on the processes by which classifications were produced. More specifically, how people came to recognise and assign value in particular situations.

Approaching this problem relied on considering three interrelated and overlapping factors. First, the *awareness factor*, which, on the one hand referred to the extent that people were socially aware of cultural trends. Simultaneously, it also referred to the extent that people, in specific situations, were aware of their surroundings. Second was the *involvement factor*, which again had a social, and a situational aspect, i.e., the extent to which individuals participated in cultural or subcultural 'movements', and how

people participated in specific situations. Socially, involvement reflected the nature of identification with certain (sub)culturally defined values. While situationally, the level of involvement reflected the proximity relationships people shared in a situation (which may have also reflected the social involvement of those present). Finally, I considered the *knowledge base*, which stemmed from people's awareness of, and involvement in, both social movements and specific situations.

As I noted in chapter 4, I began to take people to the bar, partly to get their reactions, but also to gauge their perceptions. Admittedly, in a very unethical manner, I did not tell three of the people about the culture of the place in order to obtain a less tainted reaction. In all these cases, we planned to meet anyway and I used our meeting simultaneously to pursue my research aims. The following section describes three visits and the reactions of the people. These examples illustrate the importance of awareness, involvement and culturally specific knowledge. The three people I discuss below were not told about the bar having gay clientele.

'Guy'

Guy was a single 25-year-old gay man living in London. Guy had experience of London gay bars and clubs, although he did not frequent them. He often emphasised that he was not part of 'the scene':

Guy and I visited the *Freelands* on a Friday night; the bar was relatively quiet with about 20 customers (predominantly male and gay). The interesting point was that it took Guy nearly 45 minutes before he noticed he was among gay consumers and in a gay bar. Despite the visual clues, and

the overtly camp behaviour of some people, the clue that signalled this was a gay bar was a copy of the *QX* magazine on a neighbouring table.

'Sonja'

Sonja was a recently divorced woman, 30 years of age; she had little knowledge of gay culture and had no experience of gay venues:

We went to the Freelands on a Saturday afternoon; it was relatively empty, with only three customers. During the two hours we spent there, more customers had arrived but the place was still fairly empty. Sonja did not realise it was a gay venue but noted that some of the men were staring at me and found this to be 'rude'.

'Carlos'

Carlos was a 30-year-old Portuguese male, married with one child. He lived in East London and did not frequent gay establishments. However, he did have vast experience of the hospitality industry, and as a result, was well acquainted with a range of social types and cultural characteristics:

We went to the bar on a weekday afternoon. There were only two customers at the bar and the landlord [Fifi] who was also seated at the bar. Having got the drinks and sat down, Carlos did not ask, but announced that: 'this was a gay bar.' When I asked how he came to that conclusion he pointed out that the: 'three men were obviously gay.' It was interesting to note that we sat

next to the large rainbow flag that decorated one of the walls although Carlos did not take any notice of this.

The first of the three cases brought to light the importance of *awareness* in consumption. Guy was familiar with gay culture, and its visual signifiers, but only reached the conclusion that he was in a gay space when he was presented with a key (direct) signifier (the magazine). The behavioural patterns, and body language of the surrounding guests, were not noticeable enough for him to realise that he was among gay consumers. More specifically, his situational awareness and situational involvement was low. However, because he was socially aware, and involved enough in the scene to know about the magazine, his knowledge base enabled him to conclude that this was a gay venue.

In the second example, Sonja was highly aware in the situation. At the same time, she was involved because she engaged with other people in the bar, although not verbally. However, her social awareness and involvement in gay culture was low. Consequently, she had a weak knowledge base that informed her conclusions about the venue. She was aware of people watching, and being inquisitive, but interpreted this behaviour as simply being rude. She assumed that the place was unfriendly and that this would lead to some conflict.

In the third example, Carlos concluded that this was a gay venue purely on the behaviour and mannerisms of the two guests and the landlord. He was situationally aware and involved, which led him to the conclusion that he was among gay people. Because he could identify more than one person as gay in that social milieu, he concluded that this was a gay bar. Additionally, he had enough social awareness to recognise a person's sexuality from their behaviour. However, he did not have the level of social involvement with gay culture, which would have equipped him with the

knowledge that the flag had cultural significance. For Carlos the place-image was ambiguous and the venue was 'just a pub'. His categorisation of the place, as a 'gay pub', was possible because of the people inside the venue.

Conclusion

I began this chapter by identifying three broad myth themes evident in the *Freelands*: the myths of commonality, safety and play. The chapter went on to consider some of the performative and semiotic practices (essentially signifiers) that defined and asserted these myths of hospitality space. I sought to explain the construction of place-images and place-myths through two lines of argument. The first concerned the semiotic displays of the hosts that were used to influence guests' assessments of the place-image. I argued that these processes of signification allowed those who manipulate and interpret the signals, and their corresponding signs, to create and project 'semiotic realities'. In doing so I have begun to outline the role of semiotic display in what I have called the process of 'inducement': the host's attempt to guide perceptions and subsequent actions of the guests.

The second line of argument concerned the importance of the performative in the construction of both place-images and place-myths. Following Lefebvre, I argued that the production of space was significantly dependent on the performance of lived space in specific situations. Place-images and place-myths were enacted as opposed to fixed sets of understandings. I went on to demonstrate the way representational (lived) spaces were directly reliant on both representations of space and specific spatial practices. More specifically, how ideological commonalities, proximity relations and the mobilisation of social and economic capital directly affected the production of hospitality ecologies.

Finally, I outlined the components that underpinned knowledge about a social 'group'; I referred to these components as social and situational awareness and involvement. In doing so my intention was to illustrate how culturally specific knowledge was used to understand the construction of place-images, which were then used to support place-myths.

The construction of those place-images the management wanted to encourage depended on being able to anticipate the consumers' knowledge. More importantly, it relied on the host's ability to utilise the guest's sense of awareness and involvement. Of course, this in itself did not guarantee anything. It did not guarantee that guests saw the things the hosts wanted them to see; or that guests interpreted and understood the things the host wanted them to understand. Nor did this assure that guests would agree with, or associate themselves with what they understood. My experiments demonstrated that any semiotic dialogue was only as effective as the people who made it intelligible for themselves.

In discussing the construction of place-myths, I have only begun to explore the potential role of the consumer in constructing their hospitality environment. However, the discussion already demonstrated that it was a dialogic phenomenon, where management did not create place-images or place-myths alone. What was interesting to note, was the broader dialogic circle involved in the construction and maintenance of myths that surrounded a cultural group, and their social spaces.

The producers of the hospitality experience utilised objects that already drew on a rich cultural mythology. In this case, the myths of commonality, safety and play drawn from discourses of sexual dissidence. These objects reflected, and in that sense, celebrated, or at least encouraged, the recognition of these myths as common understandings. These myths manifested themselves in the actions of those who occupied these spaces. In turn, for those participating (or observing), these spatialised cultural patterns – and the myths

that were implicitly or explicitly associated with them – fed back into the already rich cultural mythological tradition.

Within this chapter, I placed particular emphasis on the way management juxtaposed culturally significant signs to encourage certain place-images. The next challenge is to look beyond the construction of an object language and consider the performative obligations of the management in creating the experience. The following chapter develops this theme by discussing the different roles and functions of the host. Following this, I will return to the performative obligations of the guests in order to examine the host-guest relationship in the collective production of hospitality ecologies.

Notes

¹ I have used this awkward term 'not-straight' because many of the people I talked to did not necessarily feel they were gay, although they knew they were not straight.

² Dissidence is a useful way to understand people whose sexuality is 'not-straight'. It implies disidentification and the rejection of heterosexuality: reference to 'being' exists through denial of being something or someone else.

Chapter 7 Social Roles

Sunday 1.30 p.m., North London

The compère finally came on stage. This week a man named 'Fat-Blake' was the master of ceremony. He came to the front of the stage and stripped off a few layers of clothing to reveal a skin-tight, white, star-patterned body-hugger, with tassels on the arms. He mooned the audience and sang two songs. During one song: 'I would do anything for love' by *Meatloaf*, when it came to the chorus, instead of the words 'no I won't do that', he sang: "no I won't fuck that!" During the next chorus, he held the microphone out to the room and the crowd enthusiastically joined in singing.

As with all the compères, 'Fat-Blake' shouted: "do we have any Australians in today?" Half the room cheered while the other half booed. He then asked whether there were any people from New Zealand, and this time the other half of the crowd cheered while the first half booed. This was done for the South Africans, Irish, Scottish, and English. In between two countries, people started to boo and he reprimanded them by saying: "I haven't given anyone permission to boo!" The crowd fell silent. He then asked whether there were any Americans there. Three or four people cheered and the rest booed. 'Fat-Blake' then asked if there were any French there and everyone seemed to boo. He then asked if there were any men there, women there, and surprisingly, any 'poofs' there. Even more surprisingly, this still got a cheer. He then said he would: 'tell a joke for the men, a joke for the women, and a joke for the poofs.' The jokes went as follows:

“One for the women: What is the difference between ‘OooH’ and ‘Aaah’? [Pause] 6 Inches [as he simulated sex].”

“One for the men: Why did the woman cross the road? [Pause] Who let her out of the kitchen?”

“One for the arse-fudgers: What is the difference between a fridge and a poof? [Pause] The fridge doesn’t fart when you pull the meat out.”

Someone shouted something at him from the audience and his retort was: “don’t heckle me I am a professional, just like your sister!” He went on to say, that he was told he could not tell racist jokes, and then proceeded to tell the following joke:

“There were two Belgians called ‘Paddy’ and ‘O’Keefe’ [everybody laughed]. They both go to hospital with their ears burnt. The doctor asks one of them how it happened. Paddy replies: ‘I was ironing when the phone rang [he simulated the man putting the iron to his ear].’ The doctor asks the second man how he was burned. Paddy says: ‘he phoned the ambulance for me.’”

He went on to make jokes about people from South Africa and commented that they must be surprised to see ‘blacks’ and ‘whites’ peacefully enjoying themselves under the same roof. He told a joke about every nation that was present, and then encouraged the crowd to chant: ‘who ate all the pies’ at him. His act was finished with a ‘prayer’, where he thanked God for beer and reminded us that we should keep our cans in our hands.

[...]

The female stripper came on stage; there was a huge cheer from the crowd and most of the women flocked to the toilet, while the men stood and faced the stage. [I often used these opportunities to interview women who went outside to the courtyard.] A member of the audience was brought on stage and she proceeded to squirt whipped cream over her breasts. [...] As soon as the routine ended there was a massive exodus by the men to the toilets.

[...]

The male stripper came on stage; there was a loud cheer from the women in the crowd, which was then partially drowned out by booing from the men. There was another mass exodus by the men towards the toilets while the women faced the stage.

[...]

Six women took part in the first round of the wet T-shirt competition. After introducing themselves, the compère poured water over the women before turning to the crowd and asking who they thought the winners were. The women from New Zealand and Australia took their T-shirts off straight away and the crowd cheered. The compère turned back to one of the women still wearing her top and shouted: “do you think she’s done enough?” The crowd screamed back: “noooo!!!!” He then said: “do you think she should take her top off?” The crowd went wild.

[...]

There was a competition among the men to see who could do the wildest thing on stage. Out of the five men taking part, three immediately took off all their clothes and danced around the stage naked. There was a mixture of boos and cheers.

[...]

The compère came to the front of the stage again to end the week's celebrations. He reminded everyone about going over to the *Ramblers* afterwards before calling the women only to come up on the stage. [...]

Within five minutes, four women were dancing on stage with the braver ones putting on a more elaborate show for the audience. [...] One girl walked to the front of the stage, lifted her top half way up in a provocative way, and gave the room a sultry look as if to say: 'should I?' The crowd went wild. [...]

The *Temple* was a carefully managed orgy. Paradoxically, the Dionysian forms of consumption and social organisation were closely tied to institutionalised forms of inducement and control. The place-image was produced through a conscious manipulation of semiotic carriers and the choreographed rituals of social interaction. Objects such as the national flags, novelty T-shirts, the cans of *Victoria Bitter* and *Fosters* sold in bags, sawdust on the floor, and the specific genres of music all helped set the moral tone of the consumption experience. Admittedly, most of these had practical functions, i.e., to soak up the spilled fluids or to stop people injuring themselves with broken glass. However, when speaking to people about the *Temple*, the sawdust on the floor and drinks sold in plastic bags regularly featured in their description (as did the women stripping on stage).

These semiotic carriers were mobilised as part of controlled interactional rituals. In part, this process of 'control' could be understood through the notion of inducement I introduced in the previous chapter. Inducement was the often subtle process of persuasion or enticement where participants were encouraged to become engaged with hospitality ecologies in specific ways.

Even before entering the venue, myths of commonality and play were mobilised. These myths of commonality drew on discourses of national identity and common morality. The consumption experience was group-oriented and it was unusual to see people go there alone. This also related to the consumer's role as a marketing communication tool, which I will come back to later. Simultaneously, the myths of play were directly intertwined with discourses of carnivalesque space. More specifically, spaces of moral dissidence and the gendered and sexualised body.

Once inside the venue, large numbers of people were compacted into an open space with no separate seating areas. This decreased spatial proximity and encouraged mutual awareness and interaction. The *Temple* was obviously a sexualised space, and although I never saw people engaging in sexual acts, couples kissing and groping were regular sights. The body became a principal aspect of the consumer experience: at once, the physical site where consumption occurred, while the objectified body was used within discursive practices to frame and define the physical experience; the physical consuming self embodied the cultural values associated with social space.

The compère had several important roles as far as inducement was concerned. First, certain jokes (sexist, racist, homophobic) reinforced the place-image as a liminoid space, where existing moral norms were subject to inversion. No doubt, many people engaged in these behaviours outside of this place, but here, these transgressions were emphasised and celebrated.

Second, the compère mobilised the mob mentality through his 'roll call of nations', which encouraged people from specific nations to produce their own space. He used notions of *the other* to create and emphasise social cohesion. Here the notions of boundary and exclusion, even as playful distinction, were an inherent part of hospitality. Showing solidarity and affiliation toward one type of person relied on visible dissent toward others. By appealing to specific common themes, mainly around nationality,

gender and sexuality, the compère rallied certain members of the crowd. Through the process of inducement, the crowd regulated itself and reinforced certain patterns of behaviour in would-be participants. This regulation and control underpinned the heteropatriarchal nature of the experience as the male majority continuously reinforced the moral climate. Despite a number of women showing dissent toward the stripper, women still participated in exhibitionist displays every week.

The place-images and place-myths operated through the ritualisation of social practices that directly reflected specific moral and aesthetic values. More importantly, through the process of careful direction, these practices were performed in a certain way. Playing the same songs every week, the spatial arrangement, and the conscious manipulation of objects all supported these performances. The compères performed similar comic routines every week and reinforced specific collective expressive practices. The booing and cheering of certain groups were 'spectacular' examples of these expressive practices.

The functions of the guests were to continue to perform the ritual acts for their mutual benefit. Following the Foucauldian idea of panopticism, this relied on mutual awareness and the projection of influence on those around to act in certain ways. Simultaneously, those disapproving of certain behaviours were discouraged. Women were usually outshouted and their most viable form of resistance became non-participation, i.e., turning their backs during the stripper's performance or leaving the room.

Outside of the actual space, consumers acted as information disseminators (transmitters) and initiating protagonists (instigators/facilitators). The *Temple* was a group-oriented experience so it was in consumers' interests to tell others *and* bring others. This again helped reproduce both the place-image and the myths surrounding the space. In a similar way to the *Freelands*, this dissemination system assured the reproduction of the consumer profile.

One additional point must also be noted, concerning the relationship between inducement and direct forms of organisational control. The compères emphasised that we keep beer cans in our hand. This functioned as a form of inducement as most people knew that if this and other rules were broken, the repercussions would be swift and forceful. Inducement, in this case, remained a subtle practice of control but tied to powerful mechanisms of enforcement. The potential threat of physical violence and exclusion reinforced the inducement of ritualised performativity.

The *Temple* reflected the critical relationship between the mobilisation of capital, representations of groups and spaces, and the importance of human agencies in producing hospitality ecologies. This is something I will take up later. The *Temple* also raised important issues concerning neo-tribal/communitas type affiliations, the spectacular performance of identities and host-guest/guest-guest relationships. The *Temple* existed as hosts and guests purposively regulated their performances of selves, which, in turn, reflected their intentionality or sense of affiliation. Admittedly, the host-guest encounter at the *Temple* was an unusual one. Nevertheless, it reflected the guest's potential in producing his or her hospitality space, while demonstrating the host's potential regulation of that production through strategies of inducement. The *Temple* thus reflected critical issues concerning performances of selves and the power relationships within the production and consumption experience. My intention here is to develop the arguments concerning the performative characteristics of identification, the performative aspect of the host-guest/intra-guest encounters, and their implications on the production of the *Freelands* as hospitality ecology. I will begin by discussing the role of host.

The host as...

Within the *Freelands* the hosts acted as *facilitators* of experience, in both the strategic and operational sense. The management constructed the physical milieu, but along with the other staff, were not necessarily involved with the customers. In practice, this was not possible as staff were never totally absent from the bar. They served drinks, emptied ashtrays, collected glasses, cleaned up, or rearranged the furniture. In that sense, they created the environment where consumption took place. More importantly, they maintained the staging ground where social relations formed. However, the extent to which they projected their personalities on to social space was limited to facilitating consumption. This facilitation was the very least the management and staff did.

To call this facilitation is contentious; in creating the consumption environment, they were actively contributing to the place-image. Nevertheless, it was useful to differentiate between certain generic functions of facility management and specific functions of the hosts that 'animated' the experience. Both concerned the organisation of small details; the management encouraged a certain parochial social order through the manipulation of specific objects and actions. However, within the *Freelands*, the specific functions of the host directly related to the spatialised culture of the bar. In other words, instead of simply serving drinks, the hosts provided specific sorts of drinks such as colourful alcopops; and instead of just playing any music, the management or staff played certain genres of music.

Naturally, the management and staff often took a more active role, which directly related to the social order of the bar. The management and staff were *animators* of experience. In chapter 6, I illustrated the way management brought together cultural genres and myths through objects in order to form place-images. At the social level, management also organised events such as charity evenings, theme nights, birthday and

leaving parties. In effect, they were still facilitating the consumption experience, but this facilitation focused on the perceived needs of specific types of consumers. More specifically, it focused on the needs of specific social agents and the cultural values they maintained.

“Six thirty [a.m.], you must be joking! For a bunch of poofs!?!” was Steve’s reaction when we received a letter from the licensing authority about opening times during the Football ‘World Cup’. However, we stayed open for an extra two hours during the final of *Big Brother*. When it came to announcing the results, they turned off the music and everyone stood in silence staring up at the TV as if it were a penalty shoot out.

Management also organised events such as ‘Slag Tag Nite’: a blind date game where customers were given sticky labels. The person with an identical sticky label became your date for the night. This encouraged people to interact, while simultaneously setting the moral tone of the encounter. This was a direct example of how myths of play were realised in consumption activities; a game that explicitly encouraged sexual experimentation, celebrated ‘Dionysian’ forms of consumption (Maffesoli 1997). The consumption experience was constructed *through* the body while being directed *at* the body.

Animation also had an operational aspect to it. Namely, how staff contributed to the social environment in specific situations. The bar staff frequently engaged in exaggerated ‘high-camp’ behaviour as part of the service encounter. As Steve (and others) constantly repeated: ‘it is part of the act. That bar is like a stage and people expect you to be like that when you are behind that bar.’ However, beyond these highly visible routines were subtle but equally important performances. Whether it was the operational staff in a specific situation, or the management over an extended period, the hosts had a number of identifiable roles to assume. These roles had significant social functions in how they animated the consuming environment. The following section sets

out how these roles operated and examines the way these roles renegotiated host and guest relationships.

It is initially obvious to point to the role of *servant*: someone who provides a service in the hospitality encounter. This is arguably a functional role, which relates to the notion of facilitation. However, as Mars and Nicod (1984) argued, service is more than the simple provision of food or drink. Service: “refers to an action or material thing that is more than one might normally expect” (1984: 28). Naturally, the consumers had preconceived notions of what the hospitality or service encounters included, particularly regarding the way the host animated the experience. Therefore, it was particularly fruitful to think of service in terms of addressing the social needs of individuals and social units. Consequently, the usefulness of this definition is in the broader obligations implied in fulfilling those needs.

The hosts were at once, in control of the situation, but at the same time, ‘slaves to the encounter’. Within the context of the bar, the hosts had obligations towards the ideologies of the consumers. It was in the host’s interest to indulge, but at the same time, direct the needs of the consumers. The nature of the *Freelands* was characterised by a parochial social order, underpinned by relatively close proximity relationships. Moreover, the hospitality encounter was commercially oriented, and the hosts (the managers in particular) were reliant on the clientele for their wellbeing. Of course, this wellbeing was not just about income. It referred to personal safety as well as psychological and social wellbeing. The bar staff’s wellbeing was reliant on a good rapport with the clientele, while the manager had even more reason to maintain that rapport over extended periods. The customers were not just sources of income, but provided emotional support as well as free labour. Therefore, the notion of the host-as-servant is useful in understanding the long-standing obligations between the staff and the clientele.

There was a duality between indulging the needs of the customers and controlling or 'guiding' their behaviour. The hosts often acted as *conductors*: masters of ceremony who delegated as well as instigated. Managers and staff frequently asked customers to help with the shopping, decorate the bar before parties, cook food, and clean up around the bar during the night. On Daniel's birthday, he had to decide who stayed and who left after 'time' had been called. He acted as the 'door attendant', letting people in after time and showing them out the back door when they left. This was something he usually did during lock-ins. On that night, he also helped put the food out and even brought his own special ale, which we sold separately. He assumed the duties of the host, and his active role in maintaining the social order was particularly emphasised.

However, this was not unusual; guests often assumed the role of 'door-person', letting people in and showing them out after 'time'. Regulars instinctively closed the blinds, locked the front door, moved furniture, and took glasses and ashtrays off tables without the staff having to ask. On one party night during Kate's time as manager, we had four different regulars (not including me) helping to serve at the bar, someone collecting glasses, and another selling raffle tickets, all unpaid of course.

The hospitality encounter was not limited to a financial transaction for a service provided. The hospitality experience was simultaneously a social and a commercial exchange. Guests did the host favours, for which he or she reciprocated with other social or material gestures. Most people received drinks for helping out, but far more important was the way they were included into the social milieu. For example, they were invited to stay for lock-ins. Their participation in the operational (commercial) aspect of the hospitality environment signified their social inclusion into particular social units.

The hosts (staff and managers) often acted as important *connectors* who brought people into other social units. Joyce for example frequently came to the *Freelands* alone, but

expected to engage in social interaction even when there were not any familiar faces there:

Steve, for some reason, always builds me into the conversation. No matter who he is talking to he will always include me in the conversation. Like: 'isn't it Joyce', and all that. And that's how I started talk to Dave. I mean, I don't think I am being big-headed, but Steve has got a soft spot for me. Whoever he is talking to he will always look at me and go: 'isn't it Joyce', or: 'wasn't it Joyce', or: 'do you know what I mean Joyce?' It's like, are you talking to him or are you talking to me? I like him a lot; he is just a 'top bloke'.

The scenario is familiar to me; I often turned to others sitting at the bar and brought them into conversations. This was good way to meet new people, especially strangers, and find about them. The size of the bar meant people were in close physical proximity to each other and often listened in on conversations. I often saw people laughing to themselves at some of our opinions and comments. By simply asking them their opinion, the dyadic encounter switched to a triadic relationship. Quite often, the two people carried on the discussion when I went to do other things. Admittedly, I was not a neutral bystander but an active agent of change. A valid criticism was that I reified myths of commonality and play by introducing people. This was difficult to refute. However, as Joyce's comment illustrated, the role of host as connector was already evident. More importantly, for her, this role relationship was an acknowledged part of the consumption experience.

Through the process of conducting, the hosts called on specific individuals to assume visible roles within the social space. The guests were obliged to contribute to the

experience, which elevated their status. They were no longer just consumers; they were co-hosts. Coupled to this, by introducing and involving certain people into social units, the hosts signified that specific individuals were in closer proximity to him or her. This reaffirmed their legitimate contribution to the experience. Moreover, in legitimising their social status, the host increased the ability of certain guests to project their authority on to social space. The hosts acted as *power brokers* in deciding who assumed such a 'principal' position. For example, when Steve and Fifi were running the bar, Fifi let Dave, Ritchie and Joe smoke cannabis in the garden. They could move in and out of the back areas freely and they would even go upstairs to the living areas.

Naturally, this was a dialogic negotiation between the host and guest. In the Foucauldian sense, power was exercised in specific situations among networks of actors. Relative statuses depended on the level of activity or passivity of the other actors involved. When the hosts assumed a passive stance, and guests were more active, they had greater opportunities to assert their own influence. For example:

Mad Madge the shoplifter was in this afternoon with her friend. They were really drunk and kept falling off their stools. At one point they walked around the bar blatantly asking people if they wanted to buy any [mobile phone] 'top-up' cards. She had her sunglasses on and kept swearing at people calling them: 'fucking poofs', among other things. They did not have any money and kept asking for drinks. I refused to serve her but she insisted that: 'Fifi was taking care of it.' I went upstairs and told Steve and Fifi about all this but they just said: 'let her have one and that was it.' I think they were busy 'weighing something up'; they didn't seem to care.

Similarly, by allowing Dillon to drink excessively, and dance around, his behaviour and status was legitimised. In fact, when we turned up the music we encouraged this and reaffirmed his authority over space. Naturally, when he got out of hand, we often took a more active stance and tried to suppress his behaviour. In doing so, we diminished his status and his ability to project emotion on to social space. Sometimes others helped to negotiate the situation. Dillon's more sober friends regularly tried to calm him down and constantly apologised for his behaviour.

As with everything else, the notions of active or passive stance were not straightforward. The manager may have appeared to take a passive stance, but his or her influence was still there. Steve for example, used to sit in front of the fruit machine, seemingly oblivious to everything. However, there was a strong culture of surveillance and regular customers often talked about the staff to the manager and other staff. This meant that even when managers were not there, they still maintained some level of control as power was exercised through indirect mechanisms. News about inappropriate conduct or fiddling always reached the managers. For example, two different members of staff tried to cheat Dave; assuming that because he drank Vodka in quadruple measures, he did not know or care about the price, or notice if they gave him one short. In both cases, Dave was well aware of both of them and soon told the managers. In the same way, Steve regularly told bar staff off for using mobile phones behind the bar and regularly disciplined me, accusing me of not paying attention to the customers because I was reading behind the bar. This sort of information usually came from regulars like Kerri and Tom, but other (more infrequent) customers also commented on us.

This was one reflection of Foucault's panopticism where the guests were used as a control mechanism. In maintaining a close relationship with specific customers, the manager could extend his or her influence. After a few of these conflicts, it became clear that I had to watch what I did and said around certain regulars. In a similar way,

Marcus and others still used their phones, but always checked who was in the bar at the time; control was extended even further as we started to regulate our behaviours.

Within the *Freelands*, this decentred panoptical form of mutual awareness and regulation also extended beyond host-guest interaction and into intra-guest relationships. Both host and guest had obligations to perform certain versions of self in order to produce commercial and social space.

The production of gay space already relied on certain 'culturally institutionalised' performances of sexualised selves. Without these continual situational performative reassertions, the *Freelands* would have ceased to be a demarcated social ecology. Moreover, within the *Freelands*, the production and consumption of space also relied on the performance of 'servile' selves. Both sexuality and servility were linked to association with a social unit, and the ability of that unit to produce its social space. Therefore, while the host may have constructed certain parts of the experience, the guests were equally obliged to participate actively in this continual production:

I took Demi [an Asian acquaintance] to the *Freelands* for the first time tonight. As soon as we walked in, a large drunken man wearing sunglasses came up to us and called him a 'nigger'. He had been there all afternoon, and by all accounts, had already upset a few people with similar comments. [...] We sat in the garden and Jill [the manageress at the time] came out and told us about the menu she prepared for tonight. Demi and Jill exchanged a few jokes and talked for a while about food and recipes; they seemed to be getting on and Demi decided to try her 'jerk pork'. [Later] Jill called last orders but intended to keep the bar open. She asked the drunken man assertively, but politely to leave, but he refused and began to get aggressive. At this point, the DJ, four other regulars and Demi surrounded the man and

effectively forced him out the door. No one touched the man physically; they intimidated him to a point where he left.

He was upsetting the social order, which activated the myths of commonality and safety, and united the guests in a common purpose. The guests assumed the authoritarian role of the host in taking responsibility for the maintenance of the social order. The myths of commonality and safety became reified within mutually coordinated performances of selves in the production of space. Notions of property and propriety were exercised through purposive acts of inclusion and exclusion. It was also important to recognise that all those who helped were in close proximity to Jill. Most were regular clientele who were staying for the lock-in. Interestingly, Demi also participated even though he had only been there an hour. Arguably, this could be partly explained as some 'chivalrous' or even some 'hyper-masculine' instinct; perhaps his knowledge of me influenced his decision. Alternatively, I would argue that the private exchanges of hospitality between them simultaneously encouraged a moral obligation towards the social order she represented. This reflected the host's ability to draw on notions of collective interest and personal obligation to project authority over space.

The roles I have discussed so far have been primarily concerned with the exercise of power in creating status positions. The following roles extend on these notions of power and relative position while drawing further on the myths of commonality and play. Here, the notion of animation directly related to the emotional engagement between host and guest.

Take for example the host's role as *information mediator* or *gossip*. In general, the most visible (or audible) gossip centred on sexual encounters, indiscretions or questionable behaviour while being 'under the influence'. Again, this reflected the continually performed moral climate of the bar as playful and liberated social space. The relatively

high level of interaction between staff and clientele meant the circulation of information was intensive. In other words, everybody gossiped.

Because of their social mobility, and access to a range of groups, the bar staff usually knew a great deal about people's affairs. Most of the staff used this knowledge purposively. Of course, it empowered them, but at the same time, it was used as part of the performance. Gossip became a component of social capital, and the hosts used gossip to access groups. The ownership of sensitive information helped assert his or her authority within the social milieu, but at the same time, it amused the guests. Marcus was famous for having intimate knowledge about people's indiscretions, but also for spreading information irresponsibly. After Joyce told Marcus about her affair with her best friend's husband, Marcus greeted every familiar customer with: 'you'll never guess what....'

Obviously, gossip was a social tool that signified levels of inclusion and status, while the dissemination of gossip reflected the makeup of the social unit or a network of individuals (Gluckman 1963). Initially, news of the *Townhouse* opening as a gay bar, spread primarily through the *Freelands* (see appendix a). Regulars, and those in contact with frequent visitors, tended to know about it, whereas infrequent visitors were mostly ignorant about the change of policy at the *Townhouse*.

Simultaneously, the deployment of gossip also reflected the motivations of individuals in establishing and maintaining their status (Paine 1967). However, the repeated and continual spread of gossip, especially malicious gossip also stigmatised those who spread it. Steve and others said they found Marcus 'funny', although they did not trust him with any sensitive information. With Marcus, this status-marking actually resulted in an increased sense of distance from others instead of closer proximity relations.

Steve treated Dave in a similar way, although this only highlighted the inherent contradictions where private and commercial interests intersected. Steve felt very

isolated managing the bar, and frustrated with his position in the company. He told Dave about fiddles like opening the fruit machine and selling his own vodka behind the bar, even though Steve called Dave the '*News of the World*' during an earlier interview. Regulars like Dave represented a source of emotional support in an unstable social environment, despite this support being provisional. Gossip and the exchange of information helped define and maintain their relationship, but both Steve and Dave acknowledged that this was a tenuous bond. After Steve left the *Freelands*, Dave effectively stopped talking to him.

The host often connected others to a social milieu, which affirmed a person's social status. Knowledge (in the form of gossip) reaffirmed the guest's proximity relationship to the host. Shared knowledge also reflected certain issues of trust especially in the form of intimate confessions. For example, when one of the customers found out he was HIV positive he was cautious in telling only certain people. I only found out about HIV positive people through intimate confessions or through people gossiping. In general, the topic of AIDS remained excluded from public conversations and was not part of public biographies. Shared knowledge of this kind reflected particularly intimate proximity relations and networks of relationships. Understanding the dissemination of shared knowledge, especially gossip, helped to identify who was potentially included in, or excluded from, particular social units at particular times.

Gossip was also used instrumentally in the mobilisation of human labour. The exchange of gossip was used to aid closer proximity relations by promoting social cohesion and inclusion. This was certainly the case between Steve and regulars like Kerri and Dave. The inclusion of certain individuals also meant they were inclined to reciprocate. They become useful sources of information, labour or other resources (such as drugs or transportation). Among all the managers I encountered, the guests they included in their

informational circles, the ones they trusted and had close proximity relations with, were also the ones they relied on for emotional support and informal labour.

For me, gossip was an important source of data. It was essential to understand how people used cultural categories and it helped to expand on incomplete knowledge. Dave for instance came to the bar every day and kept in close contact with all the managers. He knew the owners of the bar and told me a great deal that went on behind the scenes. For example, I knew Steve sold amphetamines in the bar, and that he occasionally sold his own alcohol, but Dave revealed the scale and regularity of this. Dave also alleged that money from the *Freelands* and other bars in the company was used, sometimes to pay, but also to cash cheques for, illegal labourers in and around London.¹

As I argued above, the service encounter was a performance, and gossip was part of the 'character's dialogue'. Gossip and anecdotes often played on myths of commonality as they drew on, and created, common topics. Furthermore, they contributed to myths of play, as they were used to provoke and amuse. This relates to the role of the host as *clown* and *deviant/agent provocateur*.

The clown was the embodiment of 'spectacular' symbolic inversion. Steve's comment about playing the 'high-camp' barman was a good example. He openly declared that he was a 'grandmother' and both he and Fifi referred to themselves as 'landladies'. All this was generally accompanied by camp gestures, which were particularly overstated for the moment. Marcus even went as far as dressing as a woman and performing a 'drag act' one night. These were all public displays of inversion that celebrated the myths of play by turning them into visible spectacles; they played with notions of self and other in the creation of a hybrid, spectacular self. They were dialogic in the way they incorporated certain gender attributes and sexual categories while rejecting others. Moreover, references to sexual acts: the constant stream of one-liners, innuendoes and suggestions continually reinforced these as repeatable social norms.

The role of deviant/agent provocateur was an extension of this clown role. More importantly, both the role of clown and provocateur had self-directed or outwardly-directed examples. These however should be treated differently from orientation. All of these performances were outwardly-oriented as they were performed for the benefit of an audience. 'Directedness' refers to the topics or subjects of these jokes. Inwardly directed performances were those where people joked about themselves, while others were outwardly, as people aimed their humour at others. Marcus for example nicknamed one of the customers 'Cottage Connor' because he caught him coming out of a local public toilet with another man. The host played the provocateur and projected deviant qualities outwards in order to amuse the audience. Alternatively, John's 'party trick' was to demonstrate his ability to perform 'deep throat' by swallowing the full length of a beer pump. His expression of deviancy was directed inwards in terms of referring to his own body as sexual object. In some cases, inward and outward direction was simultaneous. Steve regularly joked about himself by saying that he did not get any sex at his age and suggested drugging me with the date rape drug *Rohypnol*. This was a regular routine of his, always performed for the benefit of others.

This leads on to the next potential role of the host, that of *sexual object*. Most of us who worked in the bar were young and male. Steve did not hide the fact that he hired most of us because we had physical appeal. Some of the staff, especially young ones like Larry played on their physical qualities and used their position to engage in sexual relations. I will return to this shortly. However, for most of the time the host was a sexual object whether he or she intended to be one or not. The culture of surveillance is inherently associated with most commercial hospitality venues. In the *Freelands*, as in many others, the management exploited this by hiring certain types of people. Issues of political correctness or discrimination never arose. Moreover, this culture of surveillance was not limited to just watching; people in the bar made us aware they

were watching. Steve and other clients continuously told me to: 'wear tighter trousers' and to: 'tuck my shirt in.' The majority of the time I simply laughed off these comments and suggestions, although it made me feel uncomfortable on occasions. As I pointed out in chapter 5, the perceptions of these comments depended on who was making them. Comments from many of the older men, like Jeff, really felt like linguistic aggressions. Jeff often sat at the bar on his own, asking questions like: 'would you consider working in cycling shorts', and constantly making other suggestions. Similarly, other bar-staff were more cynically dismissive of older men than one of their peers.

There is an important point to be made here about my position as a straight researcher. Binnie (1997) for example warned against voyeurism and misrepresentation of gay people by straight researchers. Reading the above passage may provoke accusations of giving a biased, reductive and homophobic account of gay culture. In the face of such potential criticism, I must emphasise that I appreciated how open, uncensored expressions of sexuality were important in creating gay space. However, I was not alone in considering these constant references to sexual acts to be unnecessary and often tasteless. A number of lesbians and gay men found this behaviour to be offensive and childish. Crude references to sex were ways to create a certain type of gay space, or a discourse of gay space. However, not everyone agreed with these discourses, or identified with this sort of cultural mentality.

One woman, Helen, said she only talked to Tom in the *Freelands*, as: "gay men [had] nothing interesting to say. All they talked about is who they slept with and what they did with them in bed." Similarly, as Karen commented: "if you sit and talk to two young gay men it is like talking to my nephew and niece. The standard of conversation is just piss-poor. It really is. It's like giggles and it's like: [she impersonates] '*I fuckin went into the pub and I fuckin ad im.*'"

Nevertheless, comments and suggestions that would get people reprimanded in other bars were a part of the accepted social repertoire. Interestingly, straight women also engaged in this sort of behaviour. It was an accepted part of the myths of play to joke about sex with their male gay friends. Women not only flirted but I saw (and heard of) numerous incidents where women engaged in sexual acts in the bar. One particular girl was infamous for her seduction of gay men and was affectionately nicknamed 'sperm bank' by Steve. Another older woman walked around the bar on several nights brazenly asking people if they: 'wanted a fuck?!' Throughout the time I worked at the *Freelands*, I was asked on several occasions to engage in group-sex with men *and* women, and I know others received similar offers. The staff were treated as sexual objects, and a challenge. I was singled out much of the time specifically because I was straight; the challenge was even greater. People quizzed me about my background, my sexual experiences, girlfriends, and I was often asked to expose myself. Most of the time, this was done in a joking way, without malice; and as hosts, we were expected to engage in this sort of exchange.

As I noted previously, some of the bar staff actively encouraged these sorts of social exchanges. Their roles switched from sexual objects to actual *partners*. Their roles as hosts shifted again in the kinds of hospitality they offered. For a while, the management encouraged this, as partners often came in to see their boyfriends. This meant partners were obliged to spend time at the bar, which of course meant increased income. The notions of private and commercial hospitality overlapped, and again, one was used to supplement the other. However, because relationships were often short-lived and unstable, having partners among hosts and guests frequently had the opposite effect. Arguments went on during work time and tensions interfered with the service rituals. There were numerous incidents where ex-partners came in with new partners, and sharp

exchanges were common. Sexually active people such as Marcus and John stole each other's partners on numerous occasions, which led to a lot of tension.

In the end, Steve refused to hire people who were seeing others in the bar. Partly because he was wary of tensions interfering with the work, but also because of the potential for staff to give away drinks. Steve constantly joked that the only reason he hired me was that I would never get into these sorts of situations; as a straight man, I would not give away drinks away to boyfriends or have 'dramas' with ex-partners.

The host's role, as partner, connected others to the bar. For the management, they became another informal source of labour. One of Marcus' boyfriends Luke spent so much time at the bar he practically lived upstairs permanently. In return, Luke started cooking Sunday lunches at the bar and catered for parties. Most of this work was unpaid, although Steve usually offered them vodka or speed as a gesture of gratitude. All three of them were clear about their obligations towards each other and this arrangement went on for a few months. That is until Marcus split from Luke. He stopped coming in after that, and when one of the windows was smashed, Marcus suspected it was Luke.

Sexual partnerships were often volatile relationships where the emotional commitment was short-lived. However, most relationships between host and guest were platonic, which implied a different kind of emotional commitment. Here again, very specific roles and responsibilities emerged; these were the roles of *confidant* and *friend*.

Fox (1993) commented that barmen (and women) often play the role of psychologist and social-worker. The role of confidant in this social space was a very serious and essential responsibility of the host. As I set out in the previous chapter, the myths of commonality were maintained through a sense of mutual interest. The hosts contributed to this, at times purposefully, sometimes reluctantly, but often inadvertently.

I was always surprised at how candid conversations were between the bar staff and the customers. Obviously, I must be honest about my role in encouraging this sort of social dialogue. As a would-be ethnographer, I instinctively encouraged people to talk about themselves. I listened to people's problems, their anecdotes, and their confessionals (see chapter 4 for example).

However, this sort of exchange was not unique to me. I may have been more attentive, for obvious reasons, but others also performed the role of confidant. If a person sat at the bar on their own, other bar-staff frequently asked them if they were 'alright'. Despite these being intended as gestures, people often told the bar-staff their troubles. Again, the myths of commonality, and the low level of differentiation between host and guest meant these exchanges were mutually obligatory

The majority of the time there was some shared history between the host and guest, and the sense of proximity between them was smaller. The role of friend was an extension of this role of confidant. People shared more because they could share more. As proximity relationships developed, friendships appeared to emerge, which were tied in with extended exchange relationships. Some of these were material exchanges in the form of drinks for example, but these were complemented by an emotional commitment.

Interestingly, because of her lack of social and cultural capital, Kate continually bought drinks for customers and relied particularly heavily on this to develop and maintain her social relationships with guests. Whenever she sat in the bar, she always bought rounds for the regulars, and she occasionally complained that most of her pay went on buying drinks. Of course, people usually reciprocated, but this still meant her financial expenditure was only returned in the forms of drinks, which she then felt obliged to drink.

Jill (another straight woman) relied on a mixture of patient attentiveness, humorous anecdotes and drinks, while the gay male managers relied less on drinks. Gay male hosts tended to have more access to particular forms of cultural capital; knowledge of the gay 'scene', of past relationships, and sexual encounters, meant they could engage more easily at an emotional level.

In emphasising or encouraging these kinds of relationships, the hosts developed a more intensive commitment to the bar, as a social venture. As I noted above, the hosts represented the values of social space, so obligations toward the host could be transformed into obligations towards his or her venture. As Hochschild said: "gratitude lays the foundation for loyalty" (1983: 101). Because of the myths of commonality, safety and play, the guests had a stake in maintaining the social order. It was, after all, also 'their place'. Consequently, the host could exploit this potential commitment and use this to transform consumer into producer.

Resistance and the neglect of role

Before I go on to discuss the roles of the guest, it is important to address briefly the notions of 'role distance' and resistance to the roles of host. Both terms imply some denial of the roles of the host, although the two terms reflect different kinds of rejection. Consequently, both had different implications on the host-guest encounter. I am taking the term 'role distance' from Ervin Goffman, who defined it as the actual conduct that falls between role obligation and the actual role performance (1972: 101-2). As Goffman argued: "the individual is actually denying not the role but the virtual self that is implied in the role for all accepting performers" (1972: 95).

Role distance, in the first place, related to Mars and Nicod's notion of service, i.e., offering a little extra. Where the role of the host refers to the basics of bar service, role

distance refers to going beyond basic expectations. On one of my first visits to the bar, Fifi made me a cup of tea as opposed to me having to drink alcohol. It was not on the menu and he would not accept any money for it. There was an immediate crossover from commercial hospitality to private hospitality. In the same way, when Marcus or Steve let people round the back area to 'roll joints' or 'sort out some speed', 'camp around', make rude jokes, or played certain genres of music on request, it implied a deviation from the basic role of the host as barperson. The introduction of the private and social aspect of hospitality into the commercial encounter implied a shift toward an 'augmented host' role. These examples of animation signalled the myths of commonality, safety and play through allowance and inclusion. The acts of private hospitality reflected the parochial social order the hosts projected on to the social space through their relationships with guests.

The second type of deviation, the resistance to the augmented host roles was a rejection of this animation and inclusion. Interestingly, the role obligations of the 'augmented host' were not clearly defined or clinically prescribed. These role obligations grew out from the culture of place, and staff had an implicit knowledge of these augmented roles when taking on the job. As I noted previously, staff were drawn from existing clientele; they were people already familiar with the spatialised myths of commonality, safety and play. These myths informed the staff about what were appropriate presentations of self in the service context. However, these performances of an animating self were not consistently possible.

My behaviour was often a good example of resistance to the augmented roles of host. I was known not to act highly camp behind the bar, make suggestive remarks, and I often played down my role as sex object. John and Marcus frequently told me off for being 'too boring' because I did not play camp music loud enough. They usually joked about

me, saying my problem was that I was straight. However, because I was known as straight, my 'boringness' was generally accepted as a 'heterosexual character flaw'.

Of course, resistance was not limited to me. All of us, at one time or another, distanced ourselves from our roles as animators. Sometimes this even meant showing role distance from the functional roles of bar-staff. Marcus often sat in the bar smoking and drinking during his shifts, and when people ordered drinks he jokingly criticised them for inconveniencing him. Similarly, Mondays and Tuesdays, when Marcus and Steve were 'coming down' from a weekend of substance abuse, were usually quiet nights. Most of the people that knew them understood why they were not the lively characters they were two days before. Again, their rejection of this role was understood. However, extended resistance to the roles of host (as animator) directly affected the commercial aspect of the business. When Marcus was unhappy with his personal life, this was often reflected in his performances of self, as host. He was impatient with, and rude to, customers, especially the isolated ones like Jeff who were 'soft targets'. For example, when the bar was busy, Jeff always sneaked in among the customers 'defensively' and ordered drinks in a quiet murmur (again reflecting his sense of marginality).² Marcus loudly criticised him, saying he had: 'plenty to say when no one else was about!' People started to complain about the 'bad atmosphere' and a number of regulars stayed away from the bar. This caused numerous arguments between Steve and Marcus over the coming months and eventually contributed to Steve demoting Marcus from assistant manager.

Deviations from the role of host were linked to the relationship between the host/guest, actor/audience or speaker/listener. Role distance, in terms of offering an augmented service, contributed to the social order of the place by enhancing the sense of commonality and play. The host extended the nature of the hospitality relationship because of closer proximity relations between them and certain guests. In time, the

guests, especially the principal guests, who were familiar with the hosts and the culture of the bar, expected this augmented service. Animation became part of the hospitality encounter. Conversely, when the hosts decided to neglect or reject his or her roles as animator, the guests often overlooked this because they understood the position of the host (i.e., he is straight, tired, hung over, upset etc.). However, the constant rejection of the 'animating host' roles was not tolerated and proved to be damaging to the place-image and place-myth.

The guest

I initially sought to develop a loose consumer typology based on the premise that different people had different levels of commitment to the bar. This was directly linked to the relationship they had with people inside, and to the cultural discourses with which they identified. It was necessary to develop a typology on this basis as the amount of involvement directly related to the potential role people played in constructing the hospitality experience. This typology operated as a series of status positions where those more committed and involved had higher relative positions, with considerably more power over the consuming environment. Naturally, these status positions were not fixed, but constantly reassigned and renegotiated.

To begin with, there were people identified as *principals*; regulars with the most amount of commitment to the bar, as a whole. This principality depended on a number of factors. In part, it was determined by the amount of time people spent in the bar. More importantly, principality depended on individuals' connection to others in terms of proximity and emotional commitment. Leading on from this, principality depended on the extent to which an individual was integrated into particular social units. However, the problem was that although certain relationships reflected longitudinal commitment,

the shifting social configurations meant long-term devotion to a social unit was undermined. As chapter 5 argued, social units changed shape, often forming and dissolving in one night. Integration into a social unit was dependent on the principles of proximity, and the power relations between different members of the unit.

Naturally, not all principals were the same. Some, like Daniel, were highly *connected* and he could *integrate* himself with a range of social units because of a long-standing public biography. Strong principals such as Daniel were socially mobile as result of a broad social repertoire. They tended to be inherently sociable individuals, with access to various types of capital, and the ability to communicate.

Weaker principals like Jeff were essentially regulars who come in every day, sometimes on more than one occasion. Jeff was an older man who had a rather shady public biography, and most people referred to him as an 'old pervert' because of his comments. Of course, other people also did this, but his age, looks and his manner was not particularly appealing. This meant that despite people knowing of Jeff, he was essentially an isolate. He was *disconnected* from other social units and *poorly integrated*. People greeted him, but very rarely had extended conversations with him. I only ever saw him buy drinks on a handful of occasions. In other words, he did not engage in long-term reciprocal relationships that were accompanied by acts of personal and social hospitality. This issue of reciprocal relationships was important because integration into groups was often accompanied by some financial obligations as people engaged in rituals of drink exchange.

Activity or passivity

The fieldwork demonstrated that guests had the potential to be more or less like *hedonists* or *restrained* consumers. Hedonist or restrained are not suggested as simple poles of behavioural types; there naturally existed shades of active or passive behaviour. People such as Dillon offered perfect examples of hedonist behaviour; he regularly came in and literally instigated an orgy (in the broad sense of the term). As I noted in chapter 5, Dillon had a long-standing and volatile public biography; he knew many people and many people certainly knew of him. Karen was also a good example of a hedonist. Darren once referred to her as the dominant 'Alpha' among her network of friends. Karen had two particular performative routines for which she was famous. The first was to get her friends to provide backing vocals while she sang 'Nothing compares to you' by *Sinead O'Connor*. We turned the music off in the *Freelands* on more than one occasion, just so she could perform this routine. Karen's other regular routine was to expose her breasts. On her birthday, having called the crowd to attention, she stood on a table and exposed herself to the cheers of the crowd. She did this regularly on other occasions, at house parties, and even while posing for photos. On the one hand, this reflected the culture of the bar, but more importantly, this highlighted the potential role of hedonists in producing a certain moral space.

Hedonists, in general, were *active* creatures. Because of their excitable social nature, hedonists were powerful transformers in situations by projecting emotions on to space. However, in general, other principals were more restrained; they may have been regulars but were essentially *passive*. Most of these passive, restrained consumers were less well connected or as integrated into as wide a range of social units.

The problem with such a typology drawing on connectedness and integration, and activity or passivity, is that groupings were fragmented and often shifting. These factors

may have been true for some people in certain situations, but could easily change when a new social configuration occurred. Individual power dynamics of units meant stronger members of a particular unit could suppress hedonists. Conversely, seemingly passive people were sometimes encouraged to be more active. Well-connected people could find themselves alone at times and isolates were sometimes brought into units as they spontaneously formed near them. Meeting Karen or Dillon on a quiet afternoon, especially when they were alone, often gave different impressions of their personalities. Dillon was always self-centred but his more spectacular actions always took place in the company of his friends. Again, the issues became the contextualised nature of identity performances, and the relationship among social agents in producing their own hospitality ecologies.

Larry for example came into the bar as the boyfriend of a reasonably well-connected and well-integrated regular, James. Larry was in his teens while James and his closest acquaintances were in their 20s and 30s and therefore tended to dominate Larry. After a while, Larry split from his boyfriend and started to work at the *Freelands*. Within weeks, he seemingly changed into a well-connected hedonist who I once saw on a Tuesday night dancing around in the bar with his top off. On the same Tuesday night, he got into an argument with Leon, Kerri and some of the other regulars over Larry's sexual indiscretions and deceptions. He spent the rest of the evening sat with a young man at the other end of the bar crying. Talking to him afterwards, he said he felt: 'very alone'; he felt himself to be a seemingly disconnected isolate.

Again, the issue was the way individuals, networks of agents, and social units, regulated each other's behaviour. Ridiculing through overt and aggressive comments or subtle looks and gestures often defined the parameters of acceptable behaviour situationally. Of course, not everyone was equally aware of these regulatory practices. Even when they were, it did not necessarily stop them doing whatever they were doing. Dillon was

well-aware of the parameters and was equally conscious of transgressing them. His self-surveillance was evident, although this did not extend to self-regulation except in the loosest sense. He could treat the *Freelands* as an empowering home-territory because of his intimate knowledge of the social space and his principal status.

Naturally, beyond consistent principals who were regular clients, there were also *irregular* clients. People sometimes came in every day for a week, consume extensively, and talk to a range of people. They often acted like well-connected and integrated principal hedonists. However, they then disappeared as relationships ended and stayed away from the bar. They returned infrequently, and because of their history, they could talk to people with whom they still shared some connection. However, they were no longer as extensively integrated into social units. They became transients with looser associations to people and their relative units.

Transients, people with short-lived relationships with the place and the people inside, form the last consumer type. Here again there were different levels of activity and passivity. On some nights, seemingly random people came in and turned the place 'upside-down', and we never saw them again. They would move around in space and talk to a range of people. Naturally, some encounters were more fruitful than others were.

Even here, units formed, although these may have only existed for ten minutes, a few hours, or a single night. Some people were more integrated, or more specifically, played a more active role in these ephemeral units. However, these relationships dissolved as the unit split up. Some of the actors came together again, but configurations changed. The sense of proximity underpinned the relationship of those involved and in turn, the unit's composition.

The composition of social units served to empower a certain individual and encourage them to be more hedonistic. Naturally, these compositions also suppressed some people.

More interestingly, they did not just project influence over those participating in the unit, but also over those who were in the presence or near the unit.

[One night, three young men came to bar and one of them got into an argument with Adam who was sitting with a large group of other regulars.] Adam [who always had a tendency to be loud and abrasive] became increasingly offhand with the young man. By this time, everyone on the surrounding tables was watching and listening to them. His behaviour became more camp, with increasingly emphasised gestures. When the man then made a derogatory comment about Adam's *French Connection* clothes, his retort was to criticise him about his clothing and using quotes like: 'you are the weakest link, goodbye', to cut off the young man in mid-sentence. People around him were laughing, which just encouraged Adam. The friends of the young man gathered around him and moved him away from Adam. They tried to calm him down and told him to: 'forget about it' while encouraging him to leave. The three young men left.

In a similar way, when people put certain music on the jukebox, especially rock music, regulars often complained, and insisted we: 'turn that shit off' or press the reject button. These overt and aggressive displays of territoriality were dependent on relative status positions, which were indicative of a *sense* of power and authority within space. As I noted above, people whom management seemed to approve of, and whose behaviour was condoned, had their sense of power legitimised. For example on St. Patrick's Night, the Irish manager from another pub continuously played slow brooding Irish folk songs on the jukebox. Most people complained, especially the younger ones, but Kate [who had Irish relations] dismissed their claims and played similar songs from her own CD

collection. St Patrick's Day was obviously a more legitimate time to display Irish markers of identity. However, it should be noted that Kate's Irish sense of self often materialised when she drank, and particularly when she talked to Irish people; she swore a lot more often, pronouncing 'fuck' as 'feck'. Later on that evening, Kate, the manager and his friend even started singing folk songs together. Kate's performance of self was determined by her guests, but at the same time, the guests' performances of selves were legitimised by the host.

The production and regulation of the social order thus depended on the strength of network relationships. In part, the potential for authority came from associations with hosts or certain 'connected' guests. However, the potential to project authority could be underpinned by the group someone was with, or by the activity or passivity of specific actors involved.

As Lofland, L. (1973: 137-9) noted, people often found that their empowering social space (i.e., the people around them) was mobile. They felt empowered to engage in certain types of behaviour because they brought their friends or acquaintances with them. Dyer's (2001) account of camp behaviour reflected this kind of empowerment. For Dyer and Binnie (1997) camping around was an overt expression of identification. Moreover, it was something that took on a political role (as identification) when it legitimised, and was legitimised by, the social milieu. In similar ways, individuals dancing around were often treated as 'freaks', while groups of people engaging in such behaviour were often considered more legitimate, and others would participate.

Obviously, social positions were occupied by different individuals during certain periods and in particular situations. Principality (and the perceived 'insider' status) was determined by individuals' relationship with specific hosts and guests. During Steve's time as manager, Ritchie and Joe drank there every day. Ritchie often painted the advertising boards for Steve in exchange for drinks, and the three of them sat and drank

together during the afternoons when the bar was quiet. All three of them were from a similar working class background, shared a similar sense of humour and had a common attitude towards drugs. Steve often admitted that he did not trust them although he 'got on' with them.

As stated previously, the different spheres of hospitality overlapped as personal acts of reciprocity were simultaneously used to underpin commercial interests. It is a mistake to assume these relationships were necessarily insincere, although they involved a great deal of performance and role-play. Making crude sexual references in order to amuse each other was an accepted form of entertainment. However, beyond joking around, Steve often discussed problems in his private life with them, just as he did with Dave.

It is interesting to compare this to someone like Malcolm, a man in his late 20s who had lived abroad for a number of years before coming back to London. He started coming into the bar and did not know anyone. For a long time he was an irregular isolate. Steve said there was something he did not like about him, so even when Malcolm came in during the quiet afternoons, Steve did not really talk to him. More importantly, he did not involve Malcolm in any other conversations. This would have meant involving him, and to some extent, integrating him, into other social units. Malcolm occasionally turned up in the afternoons or evenings and sat at the bar alone.

However, when Jill took over the bar she brought Alice with her, who regularly worked the quiet afternoon shifts. One afternoon, Malcolm and Alice started to talk and seemed to get on with each other. They came to be close friends, and as a result, Malcolm began spending more time at the bar. Because he was in closer proximity to Alice, he got closer to Jill and all the other people with whom they were close. It seemed perfectly natural as the new management made a conscious effort to get to know people. They consciously vetted the clientele, discerning those that were respectable and reliable patrons. Within a week of Alice and Malcolm getting to know each other, I began to see

Malcolm in there more regularly. He stayed for drinks after 'time', and within two weeks, he was serving behind the bar when Jill was busy. He was seen to be an 'insider', someone in close proximity to the management. Following this, he began to speak to a lot more people, often sitting as part of social units. More importantly, when Jill and Alice left, Malcolm stopped coming in.

Diffusion and involvement

The previous section began to explore the potential roles, obligations and positions of both host and guest. The following section continues to explore the shifting nature of consumer-producer relations by returning to the issue of myths. More specifically, I will consider the relationship between the way myths were transmitted, and the potential role of those who transmitted them and engaged with them. To do this, I have outlined two different issues: first, diffusion, and the way information about the bar was transmitted; and second, involvement, and the extent to which people were involved in the bar's culture.

Transmitters spread information about the bar but may not have felt any sense of loyalty toward the bar or its owners. In fact, they may have been hostile toward the culture of the bar. Transmission was the process of information dissemination. However, it did not automatically mean the transmitter was directly involved with the bar, its culture, or the myths associated with it. For example, one night a lesbian couple came into the bar. I had never seen them before, so, as part of my usual routine, I asked one of them how she found out about the *Freelands*. She said they had recently moved into the area and while having a domestic appliance fitted she asked the repairman if there were any pubs in the area he could recommend. He said: 'there are four nice pubs in this little area called the 'Compton village'. Well there are five, but we don't count the fifth one as it's

a gay pub.' She said she nodded along in a nonchalant way and came to the pub on following day.

Another informant told me he found out about the *Freelands* opening when an article appeared in the local paper. More specifically, his mother found out, who then said to him: 'have you heard there is a gay bar opening in Compton? I suppose you'll be straight down there.' He said he came the following week.

Both the repairman and the mother were pure transmitters. Neither of them were directly involved with the bar, or with gay culture, but they both spread word of it. In both the cases, the idea that there were 'like-people' in that social space was enough to bring consumers there. The myths of commonality existed before, but became directly spatialised, or located in the form of the bar.

Granovetter (1973, 1983), Liu and Duff, (1972), and others have long argued for the importance of 'weak ties' in the spread of key information within communication networks. For Granovetter, new information was more likely to enter into groups through weak ties, i.e., people with whom there was a less intensive relationship. They argued that strong ties, i.e., strongly interlinked individuals (as groups) were relatively closed entities where little or no new information entered. New information came from sources outside of these strongly tied networks of people, from people with whom others shared weak ties. One woman had lived in the same street as the *Freelands* for four years, but only found out it was a gay bar through a colleague from London. Because the *Freelands* was not located within her informational topographies, or the geographies of her social networks, it did not have a physical existence for her.

In some of these examples of serendipitous transmission, the importance of weak ties was evident. However, Granovetter considered information that was only transmitted through human contacts. Knowledge of the bar circulated through multiple forms of media. In the beginning, there was no advertising and most people found out about the

bar through serendipitous encounters or acquaintances. As time went on, the bar began to be listed in the gay press and appeared on the internet. Gradually, more and more people started telling me they had found out about the bar through gay publications and the internet. Nevertheless, word-of-mouth was still the strongest source of information. However, knowledge of the bar alone did not mean people came to the bar. One young man told me he knew about the bar for over a year but felt too intimidated to come on his own. He drank mostly in straight bars in the town or in gay bars in London. He only came in eventually when some of his friends had agreed to accompany him to Compton. More importantly, he only started coming in on his own after he had come with others. As I shall discuss in a following chapter, the fact that it was a known gay space actively discouraged some people from participating; the myths of commonality worked to keep people away. Therefore, knowledge of the bar and its symbolic significance alone was not always enough to get people to consume there.

Instigators on the other hand, were more than transmitters; they spread information about the venue's existence, but they also actively encouraged people to go there. Admittedly, a number of straight people with no knowledge of the bar's culture also brought their friends. However, for now, it is perhaps more fruitful to discuss those people (gay or straight) who knew about the venue, and encouraged people to come specifically for that reason.

There were gay and straight instigators, male and female, although most were gay and male. In terms of relationship marketing, instigators were the most important type of social actors. Daniel was again a prime example of this. He had birthday parties at the bar where anything up to thirty *new* people came in to celebrate. This included gay and straight, male and female, and younger and older people. They were drawn in by a rooted sense of commonality based on some personal bond or relationship. Daniel also sang as part of a gay choir and regularly brought people in from his choir group, even

when there were no parties or special events. He was a well-integrated principal who also circulated in many other social circles. Daniel was connected (albeit weakly) to a number of other social networks. At the same time, he had a great deal of loyalty to the *Freelands*. He encouraged his existing networks of friends, those that already knew about the bar, to meet him there. Daniel was highly involved but also had a high level of diffusion because of his personality and his lifestyle.

Steve hired John specifically because he assumed John would 'get people in'. Because John worked there, his friends like Patrick started drinking at the bar again after a long absence. At the same time, Steve assumed that because he was such an active principal before, his interpersonal and communication skills would encourage others to come and stay.

Well-connected people inside the bar were usually well-connected outside, although this relationship was not necessarily automatic. Nor did it mean that such connected people brought in a great deal of new people, or spread the word about the bar. The bar often represented a separate 'life-sphere' for people so straight friends, acquaintances or work colleagues were not shown, or even told about the bar. Closely related to this, individuals drawing on the myths of commonality and safety often found the bar empowering. They were integrated into social units when they were there, although this may not have been the case outside of the hospitality context. Nevertheless, people who were more closely integrated into social groups, who were well connected, and therefore more involved, were more likely to transmit positive messages about the bar. Drawing on the myths of play, they also encouraged people to come along and participate. This was most often true on party nights or weekend evenings.

For example, a well-known and generally well-liked young man, Michael, was moving away from the town and Steve organised a large party. The party was well promoted; there were signs in the bar, and it was common knowledge as people spread the news

through word of mouth. Most people expected a good evening with many people attending and a late night opening. In anticipation, several regulars made a point of inviting friends and acquaintances down for the evening. Nathan, who was actually a former boyfriend of Michael, came down despite there being a tense relationship between them since their break up. Nathan invited a group of his ex-colleagues (four straight girls) to attend the party. They were standing in one corner surrounded by a large group of other young people, mostly regulars. They were dancing, laughing and seemed to be enjoying themselves.

Besides the regulars, who came because they heard that a party was on, Michael had purposefully invited numerous ex-colleagues and acquaintances. One particular couple who used to work with Michael said they thought this place was: 'extremely friendly with a great atmosphere.' Nathan's four female friends were of the same opinion. As I noted in chapter 6, having seen the bar on such an evening, the myths of commonality and play seemed to be very apparent. Newcomers easily participated as people involved them in social units.

This leads on to a more important point; instigators acted as an active filter system. New people could be told about the bar, and brought in, but in most cases, these had to be certain *kinds of* people. These had to be people who could appreciate the myths of commonality, who would respect the myths of safety and peace, and most of all, could engage with the myths of play. I often asked people informally, and as part of formal interviews, who they would, and who they would not, bring into the bar. Their answers were always informed by a sense of proximity. Instigation (and the diffusion of information) was a reproductive system that depended directly on the sense of proximity between social actors. It was not about bringing people that were just like them, but bringing people who could engage in the same sets of interests. This also meant relating to the same sets of understandings (myths).

Obviously, most people said they did not bring in homophobic acquaintances but only those who respected the bar as gay space. This sort of response usually came from either straight people, or those gay people who were not out in other areas of their lives. Naturally, most gay people did not have homophobic friends. Some informants said they had gay friends who they did not bring here because this was not their kind of place. For some people the bar's culture was far too parochial, and the bar as a whole did not have the sense of style or 'class' that certain places in London had.

It was interesting to note that numerous people continued to patronise the *Freelands* despite showing visible dissent. This was not so much a failure of the filtering process, but reflected deeper issues of necessity and commonality. For some people this place was geographically, socially and financially accessible, whereas other venues (in the city, for example) were not. The *Freelands* offered something they could not, or were at least, not willing to, get anywhere else. Consequently, they shared a kind of love-hate relationship with the venue; often deriding the place, and the people, but still consuming there. However, most of the time, these 'cynical consumers' did not come to the *Freelands* because they could not go somewhere else. They came because of specific social ties and obligations. Daniel for example had a great of loyalty towards the place. His boyfriend Warren on the other hand, came mostly because Daniel went there so much, and because many of their mutual friends went there. Loyalty was often to social units and specific social actors; this in turn underpinned loyalty to the social space they inhabited.

I often heard regulars and infrequent patrons saying they: 'respected the fact that they [the management] had opened the bar and kept it going', and said: 'it was important to come to show support.' However, I questioned whether their visits to the bar were driven by such altruistic sentiment. It seems more plausible to suggest that their visits were linked to whether friends or acquaintances were at the bar, or there was a certain

event on. This may have been a semantic difference but I felt that coming to the bar once or twice every few months could not be equated with the sort of loyalty implied in the term 'showing support'. Support for the venue was accompanied by consistent emotional, temporal and financial commitment. Steve for example often said: 'I am not having a lock-in for them, why should I? They come in here once a month and expect me to have a late one for them. It's taking the piss; I'm not having it!'

This kind of extended commitment came from the principals, whose consumption came with an increased sense of obligation. As principals, private life, social life and work life melted into one. Neglecting one's obligations toward the bar, the management, or other principals, jeopardised one's right to exercise power. This was acceptable for short periods, but over extended periods, this increased the proximity between people, diminishing people's ability to participate in consumption rituals, especially after-hours parties.

Among the staff, it was almost expected that we came into the bar socially; staff frequently helped to collect glasses and clean up even on their days off. Similarly to Marshall's (1986) study of a small restaurant, the symbolic commitment of the *Freelands'* staff to the overall venture was significant. There was an emotional investment required from the staff and they were obliged to continuously offer their 'emotional labour' (Hochschild 1983). This was never enforced but an implicit part of the bar staff's role. Customers usually became staff because of their commitment to the bar. On the one hand, they were trusted, and on the other, they were already socially integrated. Their investment in the social space was already evident: they brought 'appropriate' people into the bar, they were communicative, and they spent considerable amounts of time and money there. By the time it came to writing my thesis, I was going to the bar less and less socially, mainly going there only to work. The regulars frequently told me off for not coming in regularly. Meanwhile, Daniel and Joyce came

and worked free of charge. Joyce openly said it was a 'great way to socialise and meet people', while Daniel admitted he loved to flirt behind the bar. Assuming the role of host became another way to consume and partake in the social experience.

Conclusion

I began by discussing the performative strategies of the host in assuming a series of roles within the consumption environment. I argued that strategic presentations of self were instrumental in reconstructing place-images and place-myths. By reasserting certain constructions of myths, the hosts helped to maintain a certain social order. This social order was not viewed as a stable entity but as a contestable set of beliefs that were renegotiated by hosts and guests in their interaction. However, by mobilising and reproducing certain beliefs among consumers (drawn from continually reasserted myths) the guests were encouraged to invest in certain versions of a social order.

However, this revealed a latent aspect of the hospitality experience. The reproduction of social values drew on the production of emotional labour. In visibly representing the ideological and emotional interest of certain consumer segments, a certain amount of loyalty was encouraged among the guests. In delineating more or less integrated guests, the roles and functions of guests shifted and the host could draw on the emotional commitment of certain guests and utilise them as a source of labour. On the one hand, guests diffused information about the venue, while they simultaneously maintained the social order. The hosts could also draw on the social and cultural capital of the guest and mobilise it for his or her benefit. Therefore, performative agencies of the guests had the potential to become 'redistributing relays' where the hosts indirectly exercised power in order to pursue their interests.

The status and position of guests was assigned through strategic acts of inclusion, as well as exclusion and differentiation. In the following chapter, I develop the notion of boundaries and exclusion. I discuss the way boundaries influenced social relationships and how they helped to negotiate the social order of space. However, what remains important is the mobilisation of cultural discourses in the consumption of hospitality. Consumption was a process of status-marking and differentiation that had the potential to become a political act. Meanwhile, this politicisation became another cultural act open to commodification, which was then purposefully mobilised for commercial interests.

Notes

¹ Steve also commented on these illicit transactions but I was never able to verify it formally.

² I am using the term 'defensively' following Sommer (1969) (see chapter 5); taking up minimal visible and audible space reflects a defensive posture and social withdrawal.

Chapter 8 Boundaries and Exclusion

Previous chapters illustrated how the production and consumption of hospitality could create, or at least encourage, social cohesion. More specifically, hosts and guests attempted to construct notions of social cohesion through performative and semiotic strategies. This social cohesion manifested itself through the creation and maintenance of (what was perceived as) a relatively stable social order. This social order was maintained by interdependent consumers, although these were not necessarily homogenous or stable social units. I have consciously tried to avoid reifying the notion of a group or community in examining these social units. Instead, the aim was to demonstrate how social cooperation was more, or less possible among networks of social actors in certain situations. Throughout this thesis, the focus has been on the process, and the necessary conditions, which may facilitate, assist, or even prevent different kinds of sociality.

Specific elements within the consumption context acted as a potentially uniting centripetal force. Simultaneously, I have considered the importance of centrifugal forces that divided and excluded. Within this chapter, I intend to develop the issues of distance, division and exclusion, which were an implicit part of sociality. Focussing on boundaries within the consumption experience helped to understand further how the processes of sociality operated.

All acts of inclusion are simultaneous acts of exclusion, and in choosing something, we are inevitably choosing against some alternative (Bourdieu 1984, Douglas 1996). In terms of identification, exclusion is a position-of-distance where lines of demarcation and boundaries are not so much established, but practiced. Treating boundaries as process and practice, helps to clarify how identification works through the performative. Boundaries are interpreted as necessary component of broader discursive practices and

strategies of exclusion act as indicators of continually performed social norms. By demonstrating how boundaries became visible in the *Freelands*, we can continue to examine what behaviours and actions were permissible, and in what way. More specifically, I will examine how certain social norms reflected the exercise of power within acts of identification. Boundaries reflected what was *possible*, and how these possible articulations of self were aided by strategic acts of exclusion.

Firstly, I shall outline *externally-oriented* boundaries that delineated space in a broader social or political-geographical sense. If social space was considered a cultural resource, then its protection was essentially the management of scarcity (Hirsch 1989); the construction of boundaries and strategies of exclusion were essential to maintain the social order of the social space (Moran et al 2001). In part, these exclusionary practices operated through physical boundaries. However, there also existed socially maintained *externally-oriented* boundaries, as was the case with the control of information distribution. These types of boundaries form one part of a discussion on exclusion, identity and identification.

Internally-organised boundaries, while still related to identity and identification, reflected to proximity relations among networks of social actors within the social milieu. Internally-organised boundaries reflected the way individuals and social units organised themselves in the consumption environment. Consequently, the discussion is concerned with the politics of identification, and at the same time, the processes of identification.

There is also a need to examine *inwardly-directed* boundaries: exclusionary practices that operated externally to social space but were maintained within social practices. The social position some people adopted meant they excluded themselves. Boundary maintenance was constructed outside of the consumption context, but directed inward towards that context. Individuals still engaged with the myths and discourses that

surrounded space, but did not necessarily participate directly in the consumption rituals that took place there. Thus, self-exclusion represented another form of social positioning and an act of identification.

All three notions of boundary maintenance operated interdependently in the construction of some actual or perceived form of exclusion. This is something which becomes clear as the discussion develops. However, there was a notably porous divide between internally-organised and inwardly-directed boundaries. In part, these extended from proximity relationships. For example, social distance or divisions based on age, class or attitudes towards discourses of sexuality and identity were reflected in exclusionary practices. The boundaries were constructed by those inside *and* outside the social environment.

Externally-oriented boundaries

Information and knowledge

Information, and the control of information dissemination, was the most obvious form of exclusion. Everyone agreed, the main reasons the bar flourished was because it had a 'low profile' and kept 'low key'. It was out of the way and relatively few people knew of its existence outside of certain social circles. This was especially true in the first year-and-a-half. As I noted before, after this period the bar began to appear in listings guides and management advertised infrequently through niche media. The people who found out about the bar through specialist gay publications and internet sites were looking for it in the first place.

The control of information also had a strong geographical and social aspect to it. The bar was located away from the town centre. The outside of the bar was unassuming and

the only reference to the gay clientele was the small rainbow flag in the window. As I argued in chapter 6, this signal only became a sign for those with the necessary level of awareness and knowledge.

Socially, the transmission and diffusion of information was usually limited to specific types of social networks and groups (see chapter 7). Nevertheless, as I also indicated in chapter 7, certain actors served as transmitters of information even when they had no immediate relationship with the place. Transmitters who were also instigators (and to some extent, participants in the bar's culture), acted as social filters. Exclusion played a significant part in the construction and reconstruction of the social order because only certain types of people who fitted into that social milieu were 'selected'. As I argued, these people could positively engage with the cultural and physical environment. Of course, this filtering process was not foolproof, nor was it always so purposive.

On more than one occasion, people brought in what seemed like very homophobic or (at least) very insensitive people. For example, on one of the birthday parties, one of Karen's friends brought in an ex-navy man named 'Chippy'. During the lock-in, everyone was 'mingling' and I sat down next to his table and talked to others sitting in the vicinity. I turned to Chippy and asked him who he was how he came to be there. His response was to say: "look mate, I am not queer!" I reassured him that I was not making any advances towards him. He abruptly continued by saying: "four fucking queers have already tried it on tonight!" The rest of us at the two tables looked at each other in astonishment but he seemed oblivious to our reaction. He repeatedly made rude comments about people kissing and about how they tried to: 'chat him up.' I asked him why he came here, and he indicated that it was because of his friends.

This sort of behaviour occurred on numerous occasions. These kinds of derogatory comments were usually defended by statements such as: 'don't get me wrong, I have a lot of gay friends, but....' It appeared that having gay friends or acquaintances made

individuals feel they had the right to voice insulting and negative opinions. Some people made subtle throwaway snipes about ‘poofs’ and ‘queens’ while others used the term ‘queer’ in a harsh tone. This was often perceived as unreasonable hostility by hosts and guests.

Physical exclusion

The bar was small with relatively low investment, so formal door security was not feasible. For the majority of the time, it was not even warranted. As I mentioned previously, on special occasions such as Christmas, New Years and late night events, guests usually ‘managed the door’ in return for drinks.

Paradoxically, the most visible form of boundary was invisibility. In principle, this was about dividing what was outside from what was inside. The management put blinds up, which were lowered at around six or seven o’clock. The bottom row of glass panes were covered in frosting to allow some light in, while preventing people from looking in. Fifi said this was important so ‘straight’ men could come in without being seen. This hid what was inside, which reinforced the culture of allowance as it negated the potentially harmful surveillance.

The basis for this strategy of concealment was the social-geography of the area. The perceived culture of the town meant visible displays of sexuality were inappropriate and would have attracted unwanted attention. This invisibility was in direct contrast to bars in areas like Soho in London or the Village area of Manchester. Branded venues such as *Manto* operate through the notion of visibility with large windows and façades that invite attention.

‘Visual boundaries’ are common exclusionary strategies for the management of gay space, although these are not always perceived positively. For example, this was Warren’s comment on *Whytes*, a gay venue with a windowless frontage:

Do you know what? It is a huge barrier between gay and straight. The frontage of the building: it’s a completely blacked out window. You wouldn’t know it was a pub. It’s for no one to see in; to see what is going on behind. I think that’s really crappy. You go to London, to Soho, and the pubs have huge windows so that people can look in and out to see what’s going on. Why would you want to be confident and gay and then hide behind something!? I know there are people who have problems with being gay, who don’t want to come out. It’s married men trying to hide from their wives. I don’t know. I found it silly. They are doing it [here] now aren’t they? [...] It’s like we’re hiding from ourselves. There is not much point in being confident about being gay in our own community when out in the real world... [Pause] Go out and be gay and be proud of it. That’s it. Be gay!

For Warren, the idea of a delineated gay space was a point of distance. Invisibility and the confinement of sexuality reproduced the idea that something needed to be hidden. Karen expressed a similar view when talking about denying façades when she said: “it does make you feel ashamed.” For emerging generations of lesbian and gay consumers, who lived relatively open lives, these kinds of fronts were denials of sexual selves. Often the same young people questioned whether having gay/gay-friendly bars were positive things at all. The separation of ‘gay space’ from ‘straight’ was perceived as a mixed blessing. On the one hand, it reproduced artificially constructed divisions on the grounds of sexuality. At the same time, the specific hospitality ecology became an

empowering space where expressions of sexualised identity were permitted. This was an effective form of hegemony where the spatial location of sexuality constricted and contained sexual identification. Nevertheless, the myths of commonality helped to assure that people wishing to engage in the consumption of physical, symbolic or social objects, or acts (alcohol, music, sociality, sex etc.), could converge in geographical space. The notion of gay space thus offered a certain degree of certainty in terms of the sort of people that consumed there. As the man I quoted earlier said: 'it is less likely that you waste your time chatting someone up who turns out to be straight.'

From a functional point of view, people in general appreciated that blinds helped to privatise the space. In part, this concerned the issues of sexuality, but also referred to the lock-ins and late night parties. These late night events would have been problematic if they were carried out in full view of the neighbours. More than one manager said the police 'allowed' the bar to operate after official hours because there had never been any serious trouble from the bar, and because late nights were kept discreet.

Arguably, this signalled the hegemonic organisation of a cultural 'group' and their consumption practices. As the culture of allowance was spatialised, it set geographical limitations on its performance or consumption. However, this would imply some deeper conspiracy on the part of the police and the licensing magistrates. I think it more plausible to suggest that the bar was allowed to operate because it was away from the centre of the town and because of its discretion. The bar did not attract the younger, louder and more violent clients, which would have certainly brought complaints from the residents and increased surveillance by the police.

Internally-organised boundaries

External boundaries were overt forms of exclusion that were instrumental in continually reproducing the social order. My intention here is to examine how engagement with the social order (maintenance, resistance, or transformation) reflected the politics of identification. I am seeking to demonstrate how internal boundaries, extending from specific forms of social organisation, played a critical role in social positioning and identification within the hospitality context.

Arguably, the control of information dissemination was already a socially organised form of boundary maintenance. However, where information may have been the property of those engaging within the social environment, this exclusion took place outside of the 'consuming environment'. Internally-organised boundaries materialised in the micro-politics of social interaction within the bar. These exclusionary strategies and boundaries formed through the negotiation of proximity relations. As such, they often reflected social positions and status within the consuming environment.

I have already referred to the perceived notion of group status assigned to informally organised social units, or loosely connected networks of actors (chapter 2). People felt excluded because of a perceived consistency of the unit's members and a sense of distance between him or her and those apparently inside.

The following event took place on a Sunday afternoon during Steve's period as manager when Malcolm was still a very infrequent and peripheral consumer. John, James, Patrick, Liz, Kerri, Larry and a few of their other friends were in the bar laughing and joking. John was still working there at the time and they all treated the bar as home territory. They were very much the principals at that time, spending a lot of time and money at the bar. Patrick said some people actually referred to them as the 'A-

group'. This 'A-group' was a loose association of people with John, Patrick, Kerri and James being principal figures; others joined their 'unit' in certain situations.

John and the others had pizza delivered to the bar and were conspicuously enjoying themselves. John was playing the 'über-camp' bar man and they were all sharing jokes and anecdotes. Malcolm came in and sat at the bar next to them. His body language very much indicated that he wanted to join in. He turned to them and laughed along at all their jokes. He even tried to join in and when someone asked a question from the group, he gave an answer. This was acknowledged and he moved his stool closer to the others and leaned forward to be closer to the actual unit. However, they did not talk to him or engage him in any further interaction. He sat there and looked over for a while, occasionally taking a breath suddenly, as if he was going to contribute to the discussion. As others jumped in, he never got to speak, and his body language increasingly signalled his awareness of the fact that his potential for inclusion lessened. He started leaning back on his chair, although he was still very much open to interaction and paid attention to the unit's activities. He left soon afterwards.

[On a similar occasion] Malcolm came in and greeted me enthusiastically with: "I haven't seen you in ages, how are you?" [I had only met him once at that time but we exchanged a few pleasantries.] He looked around and went over to Marcus and his boyfriend and greeted them similarly. They were not too responsive so he came back and sat by the bar and scanned the room again. A group of men came in after a while and he seemed to recognise one of them. He went up to them and greeted him with the same

enthusiastic comment. He seemed to get a more positive response this time.

Malcolm stayed and talked to the man, and eventually started to talk to others in their social unit.

Obviously, the proximity relations, and the potential to engage with individuals and social units, were negotiated among participants. In both incidents, Malcolm did not get the appropriate response from certain people that would have facilitated a continued interaction. Arguably, the perceived sense of exclusion was also dependent on the perception of the individual. If he or she *felt* as though they were not being included, this became an implicit process of exclusion. The formation of a boundary was formed dialogically by those inside *and* outside of a particular social unit.

It was important to note how people responded to questions concerning groups, cliques, and exclusion and inclusion, in the formal interviews. For example, both the Karen and Nicola referred to Daniel's 'group' as a coherent and closed social entity whose participants were hostile toward them and other non-members. However, neither Daniel nor Warren (who were key people in certain units) expressed any antagonism towards either of them. What the questions about groups and cliques served to demonstrate was people's social position and mobility within the social environment. Michael and Daniel for example said they did not feel there were any closed groups. Neither of them felt there were cliques, or any groups they could not talk to or engage with.

But of course they did not feel any sense of boundary or exclusion. Michael was a young, physically attractive, well-connected gay man. The management and many of the key principals knew him and reinforced his connected status. However, even in other bars (in unfamiliar environments) he could easily mix with people. His favourite 'chat up' was to walk up to someone and stick his tongue out at him provocatively. Not everyone had the aesthetic capital to be able to do that. Daniel was similarly connected

because he had the necessary social and subcultural capital. It was understandable that these people did not feel excluded from any groups.

This was in direct contrast to Adrian, a poet and painter in his late 70s who bore an uncanny resemblance to the art critic *Brian Sewel*. Adrian spoke in a contemplative voice, with a refined English accent and understated mannerisms. Others told me he held a knighthood although he was always modest about it and played down its importance whenever I brought it up. The sense of distance between him and the publicly circulated discourses of gay identity was enormous. His age, class background and his interests distanced him from the bar and everything it represented. He loved art and classical music, but felt few people were interested in what he had to say. This was not altogether true. His friend Gary (a 21-year-old labourer-come-jazz pianist) and others regularly debated the strengths of *Mahler's* work for hours in the bar. However, the general clientele of the bar, in terms of class and attitude, made him feel isolated and distanced from most social units. Admittedly, his personal sense of social mobility was constrained, although his perception amplified his sense of isolation.

Territoriality, boundary and exclusion

The following section approaches the problem of territoriality in two ways. The first issue concerns the specific acts of boundary maintenance in social interactions as a way to assert territory. The second concentrates on broader discourses of identification and myths as they converged to form points of exclusion.

The assertion of personal or social territory usually worked through a mixture of defensive or offensive tactics (see Chapter 5). People turned away to avoid engagement or spread out their own personal items (e.g. clothing), to project their own characteristics on to the surrounding space. People sometimes took more overtly hostile

positions by insulting people or visibly gesturing their wish to avoid engagement. The appropriateness of these tactics was limited to the extent they were recognised as forms of exclusion, and their effectiveness depended on whether they were accepted as such. Some seemed obvious to the rest of us, but were not noticed by the actual people who they were aimed at.

Usually, the failure to notice potential exclusion was caused by severe inebriation. Lewis was notorious for overstaying his welcome; he tended to talk to people, paying little attention to their actual interest. If they failed to react to his comments, he would simply talk louder. Similarly, when Frank started to come to the bar again, he often talked to groups of people where he knew one or two people in that unit. I once saw Frank literally dribbling while explaining to two people what a good father he was. The look of disbelief on the faces of the two men was difficult to miss. They tried to carry on with their own conversation but Frank continually interrupted and carried on talking. Similarly, Dave and Frank were 'together' for a while. Frank used to sit and talk to Dave at the bar; Dave would look around, play with his mobile phone, and even start talking to others, occasionally turning to Frank and giving a nonchalant 'yeah', obviously showing signs of disinterest. Frank would continue to talk, apparently oblivious to Dave's gestures.

Others were more overt and straightforward. Jeff once went up to Ritchie and abruptly asked him if he wanted to have sex. Ritchie's response was: "you can fuck right off!" Following this incident, Ritchie often criticised Jeff on his appearance publicly and loudly, constantly referring to him as a: 'dirty old man!' Jeff usually sat at the bar, although when Ritchie and Joe were in, and sat at the bar, he usually sat at one of the tables on the other side of the venue.

These expressions of exclusion reflected proximity relations and distance between individuals. They reflected visible moral and aesthetic territories of taste and social

position. However, it is also important to consider how territories of identification related to broader discourses of sexual identity and property relations. In order to do this, it appears useful to return to the notions of myths (as collective understandings) that call on certain discourses of identity. As I noted previously, for Binnie (1997), Dyer (2001), and Meyer et al (1994), 'camp' is a political expression of sexual identification. The ability to act camp draws on myths of commonality, safety and play as they become expressions of a liminal identity. Camp is a visible expression of dissident sexuality that challenges and redefines fixed notions of sexual identity. As such, these are social positions, which not everyone identifies with. As Dyer noted:

The togetherness you get from camping is fine, but not everybody actually feels able to camp about. A bunch of queens screaming together can be very exclusive for someone who isn't a queen or feels unable to camp. The very togetherness that makes it so good to be one of the queens is just the thing that makes a lot of other gay men feel left out. (2001: 50)

For people like Mike and Simon, who were not out in other areas of life, visibly camp behaviour represented a strong point of distance. These expressions of sexuality were alien to them, and they often found it discomforting. Mike often looked at me, rolled his eyes or shook his head and laughed to himself when people around him were 'camping it up'. He often commented that the people behind the bar were being 'wankers' when they were acting camp.

Simon was similarly uncomfortable about overt displays of [homo]sexual identity. His socialisation meant he was distanced from most gay cultural spaces and from associated patterns of behaviour. One of his friends, Dean, said: "Simon thinks he is 'homosexual' and not 'gay', because he sees gay as being 'camp' and 'queeny'."

There was a strong linguistic element to his location; his lexicon incorporated very few popular gay cultural terms and his style of speech was masculine as opposed to the feminised (camp) expressiveness. His experiences as a gay man, living in secret, placed him in greater proximity from gay culture. Consequently, he felt distanced from people who aligned themselves more closely with these cultural values. Simon told me of numerous incidents where he felt vulnerable and embarrassed when going out with Dean and Nathan; they acted visibly camp, held hands and even tried on clothes in women's shops.

Mike and Simon could engage with the myths of safety and play; they benefited from the externally-oriented boundaries in delineating a space of allowance. They considered the bar to be liminal space, where they could consume both material goods and emotional experiences. However, the extent to which they identified with discourses of commonality was questionable. They considered themselves to be dissidents in terms of disidentification, but their commonality was essentially limited to this denial of heterosexuality. They did not necessarily identify with these popular and visible discourses of homosexuality.

“Jumped up little queens with their heads up their fucking arses!” was how Tom (our resident DJ) referred to people connected to the ‘scene’. He showed a great deal of disillusionment and hostility towards the scene as a whole. I never found a direct answer for why he felt so negative but assumed it stemmed from some negative experience of people on the scene. He made a point of not going to ‘sceney’ places (meaning London) and derided extravagant performances of queer selves.

Adrian went even further in consciously rejecting any classification, both in terms of his art, as well as his sexuality: “I have excluded my sexual life, or what most people think of as sexual life, because there is too much to... [Pause]. I don't want to be confined

into, perhaps being pigeon holed into one section.” For Adrian, all the sexual connotations of the bar were either considered points of distance or irrelevant.

I have no objection to its existence. Far from it. I am not very happy about any establishment which creates one community together. I don't like French pubs, or the French. I am not too keen on Irish pubs, where only the Irish... [Pause]. Where if you're not Irish you are looked at. Or for black people or Asian people. I like the concept of integration of people. I can understand why the *Freelands* exists and I am the last person to object to its existence. But I am hoping that in years to come, all people are accepted, irrespective of what they are – in terms of their colour, sexuality or their age. I have had incidents in the *Freelands*, where my personal feelings of isolation perhaps come out. And sometimes I feel uncomfortable. Because I like a pub which is not directed toward one type of society. I have never gone to a pub for security. I have never needed it. I go to a pub with this friend of mine because we enjoy talking about things, but the pub just happens to have good beer, but the place would be insignificant.

He did not feel a need to be visible in the political sense, or invisible in the practical sense. The myths of commonality, safety and play were mostly irrelevant, and he felt no sense of tribal affiliation. Of course, to reject any classification implies assuming some social position. This itself formed a political statement about rejection, which simply became another potential category of person.

The key points to draw from this concern the limitations on whom certain people could engage with, and the restrictions on their engagement. Identities, defined in relation to the identities of others, acted as a boundary, which distanced certain people in terms of

proximity relationships. Mike, Simon, Tom and Adrian were excluded from these territories of identification. More specifically, the process of exclusion was dialogic in the way it was performed mutually. In other words, it was not so much being excluded by others, but excluding oneself as a way to assert alternative territories of identity.

Beyond proximity relations, the territories of sexual identity were often constructed through assertive displays. I recall going to a gay bar/club in Hungary where large numbers of straight men and women were visible in the gay crowd. At one point, the DJ assertively called on the straight people to stop kissing on the dance floor and respect that this was a gay place. This seemed to explain why we were continually shoved aside and bumped into by hostile 'drag-queens' throughout the evening. We were threatening the social order by diluting or challenging the notion of a delineated gay space.

The resident DJ at the *Freelands* continually made similar assertions over the microphone during his sets, overtly referring to it as: 'Compton's Gay Venue.' This briefly changed to Compton's 'official' and 'original' gay venue when the *Townhouse* opened, but after we found out it was closing, Tom started to emphasise the word 'only' during his announcements.¹

Kate was the second straight woman to run the bar and rumours of it turning straight became more and more frequent. A lot of the older regulars stayed away for one reason or another and there was a steady influx of straight people, especially groups of women. Kate told me that Tom had been hostile towards straight people in the bar. I knew he had a tendency to call women 'fag-hags' in a cynical tone over the microphone, and I assumed she was referring to this. However, talking to others, including Tom, enlightened me about the specific context in which this hostility appeared. On one night, there had been a misunderstanding between a young regular and one of a group of straight men. Tom heard this, came on the microphone and said: 'if people have come to see the animals at the zoo then they have come to the wrong place. If anybody gets any

trouble in here tell either me or one of the bar staff and we'll get them thrown out!' The men heard Tom's comments and there were threats of violence and shootings.

Announcing that the bar was gay, defending the patrons, or being hostile to those seemingly encroaching on that space were all acts of boundary maintenance that reflected the situationally defined or performed character of space. In situations where the place-myth was challenged, the official hosts or other principals reasserted these collective understandings. The 'de-gaying' of what was potentially a gay space was treated as a threat to all; and Tom's visible reassertion of territory was a form of boundary maintenance that reinforced the myths of commonality.

I never actually witnessed any physical hostility towards people at the *Freelands*. The straight men that came to the bar usually came in the afternoons, and their patronage was usually invisible. If they became visible because of some hostile behaviour, the hosts, or guests assuming the role of hosts, usually curtailed their behaviour. When women came, hostility was limited to snipes and comments such as 'fag-hag'. While some of these were overt, as in Tom's case, most of these comments were never actually directed at anyone, but exchanged among the regular clientele. Even when people did call others 'fag-hag', this did not automatically signify hostility. As with other terms, their implication depended on the intonation of the speaker and the relationships between the speaker and the listener.

Moon (1995) for example, illustrated that the term 'fag-hag', though loaded with negative connotations, could also be part of an inclusive culture. When James or Leon called Liz or Samantha these names, it did not have the same negative connotations as elsewhere. Along with openly touching their breasts, these comments were an accepted part of their relationship. It reflected the moral flexibility of their relationship, and an understanding where these terms were used to reflect inclusion. In a similar way, when

Jill or Samantha called them 'nancy boys', 'screaming queens', or 'poofs', it was not taken as hostility.

As I noted previously, the bar was very much oriented towards gay male clientele. Strategically employed derogatory terms such as 'fag-hag' and 'dyke' reflected a process of othering, which used signifiers of gender and sexuality to reinforce the notion of masculine space. This may have seemed contradictory as camp behaviour apparently challenges existing binary divisions between male/female and masculine/feminine (Dyer 2001). However, just as these binary distinctions were not strictly maintained, there were situations when they were employed as part of a strategy of territorialisation.

Joe and Ritchie for example referred to lesbians as 'dykes' in a derogatory sense. Here the discourses of sex and sexuality intersected with factors of class and socialisation. Ritchie and Joe did not mix with women in general, and they had a coarse sense of humour. Moreover, Joe, Ritchie and even Steve felt the *Freelands* could never be run by lesbians; they said: 'it would not make any money and there would be too much trouble.' Their attitude to lesbian women was informed by stereotypical images of 'butch aggressive dykes' and lesbians in general as low spenders. In the same way, employing negative references for women, especially when referring to the female sex organ were part of a sanctioned routine. Many of the male guests, young and old, camp and 'straight-acting', regularly made jokes about: 'not doing fish.' In objectifying the female sexualised body, it became a point of reference and employed in the discourses of identification.

The territorialisation and the projection of masculinity over space was partly achieved through a malevolent denigration of women. Simultaneously, the physical and economic invisibility contributed to the drowning out of the female voice. The effect of

marginalisation and low representation reinforced the performative reality of the social order.

It was through the constant and visible references to discourses of gender, sexuality and the sexual act that maleness became an accepted part of the place-image. I have already discussed the reaction of certain (lesbian) clients to these constant references to sex, and the male sexual act (cf. chapter 6). Karen found this particularly frustrating and actively resisted this by talking about the sexual female body. She said that when men reacted with comments about 'fish', she talked about it even more to annoy them. Karen found these to be points of separation and distance and she actively resisted these projections of masculine sensibilities over social space. For others, like Helen and her girlfriend, the sustained linkages between performative displays of particular discourses of gay male sexuality, and the assertions of a gay male space, continued to be points of distance. Their reaction was to limit their participation in the social milieu. As noted in the previous chapter, they made a point of only socialising with Tom, whose social repertoire was not limited to these discourses of gay sociality.

There is a further point to be made concerning internally-organised boundaries and the male dominance over space that became evident in performative practices. The toilet was an interesting source of conflict over gendered and sexualised territories in space. Gay men, especially the younger effeminate ones, frequently used the women's toilets. Naturally, a number of women (lesbian and straight) objected to this practice. On the one hand, this served to reinforce the negotiated and reconfigured nature of gay space. These practices helped deconstruct heterosexual configurations of space, which is segregated according to existing gender norms. However, these practices also reinforced the male domination of space and the potential marginalisation of female occupants. Men could pollute female space, both literally and symbolically. Conversely, for women, the male toilet was already a polluted and dominated space.

When I asked women about this, most objected, although none said they would stop coming to the *Freelands* because of this. Nevertheless, this detracted from the place-image of the *Freelands*. If this did lead to decreased participation among other women, and therefore, the decreased visibility of women, this undoubtedly diminished the general appeal of the social space for women. Consequently, these kinds of social practices, and their exclusionary implications, potentially influenced the gendered and sexualised production of space. At once, challenging heterosexual norms, while simultaneously articulating patriarchal values.

Inwardly-directed boundaries

There were numerous reasons why people excluded themselves from the consuming environment. Some explanation could be sought through understanding proximity relations among specific individuals. Other reasons could be found in socio-political, economic, aesthetic, or moral positions that manifested themselves as taste.

I have already indicated that people often stayed away from the bar because of the break-up of a relationship. These and other interpersonal tensions frequently lead to people avoiding the *Freelands*. However, it is more important to consider the broader sets of factors that alienated people from the bar as social space. If we treat Bourdieu's notion of habitus as a strong socialising influence, then the constant stigmatisation of homosexuality was obviously the biggest aspect of boundary:

[During one of party] a couple came into the bar; both the man and the woman were in their early 20s. They walked in slowly, and looked around inquisitively, which indicated that this was their first time at the bar. They ordered a drink but then left suddenly, putting their half-finished drinks

down at a table near the door. They looked visibly nervous and in a hurry to leave.

[Similarly, during one afternoon] four large [very straight looking] men [all above 30] walked up to the bar door. Two walked in and the other two seemed to walk off. The two inside ordered some beers and sat down. After a while one of the other men came back and whispered something to the other two men. The two men started to laugh nervously and began to call the third man names. They all departed quickly and the two men left their unfinished drinks at the table. As they were leaving I could see the fourth man outside laughing at the others as they came out looking slightly vexed.

The abrupt and swift exit of strangers was usually met with the comment: 'I think he was in the wrong pub', from other customers. Judging from the behaviours of some people, it was obvious to see they left because they realised where they were. However, it was difficult to run after people to ask exactly why they left. Additionally, it was difficult to contact people who did not go to the bar but would be receptive enough to sit down and give an honest account of why not. I was hesitant about asking strangers if they knew about the gay bar, whether they went to it or not, and if not, why not?

Again, my own male friends were useful in understanding these inwardly-directed boundaries. Most of my oldest friends in this country are strongly homophobic. Jokes about sexual preferences form a large part of their social repartee. Apart from two visits, which their girlfriends helped to instigate, they never came to the bar. The following is an extract following one visit:

All the time when walking to the *Freelands* Martin and Brian kept talking about going somewhere else and threatening that if anyone: ‘tried anything’, they would start a fight. Jeanette kept reassuring them they would: ‘have a laugh.’

We went in and walked straight to the bar. I could see they were all highly conscious of their surroundings. Martin and Brian both stood unnaturally upright, turning their heads constantly, scanning the room; Jeanette was already dancing around. We bought some drinks and I said hello to a few people. Brian saw that the garden was open and said he thought it was better if we sat outside. Martin agreed and Jeanette started laughing at them. [...] [We sat down at one of the tables in the garden.] James came out, greeted me with: “hello straight boy”, and kissed me on the cheek. I introduced him to the others. Brian looked visibly flustered and said to James: “sorry, this is my first time in a place like this.” James replied: “I am usually hanging around bushes but I thought I’d come here for a change. That is what gay men do don’t they?” Brian saw the joke and seemed to relax. [Later] When it came to the next round, Brian and Martin started arguing; both said the other one should go to the bar. Jeanette had been keen to go inside all the time and she gladly volunteered to get the drinks. [Later] They were closing up and we all went inside and sat at the back left corner on our own. Several people came over to say hello to us and both Martin and Brian got into conversations with people. [...] When Martin was talking to Ritchie about one of Jeanette’s gay relatives, he used awkward terms such as: ‘he was someone like you’ and: ‘that way inclined.’ [...] Everyone seemed to find common topics of conversation and they seemed to relax. [All three of them talked to several different men during the evening.] [...] Later on, Martin

asked if anyone: 'wanted a fag', and all three of them burst out laughing.

[...] When we walked home, Martin and Brian constantly repeated the joke and made derogatory comments about being 'chatted up'.

If we consider the habitus to be a stable socialising factor, then it is obvious to conclude that the construction of boundary extended from this socialisation. When meeting specific individuals, some of the tensions that extended from this socialisation may have been suspended, although they were reinforced by others in the social unit. Furthermore, while some boundaries may have been suspended, they could not be abandoned altogether.

Self-exclusion usually stemmed from social position. Some, like Adrian, excluded themselves, partly because they felt distanced from the people inside, and from the discourse of the bar, as social enclave. In Adrian's case, this was a rejection of social categories relating to sexuality. This did not deny categories, but boundaries formed as a potential rejection of being limited to a specific category. Others stayed away specifically because of the hierarchies that categorisation celebrated.

One Australian man lived with two others practically across the road from the *Freelands*. I met him on the first night he came to the bar and asked him how he found out about the bar. He said he found out from his two gay flatmates and I asked who they were and whether I knew them. Despite living in the same street, he said: "they would not be seen dead in here!" I quizzed him about who they were and why they didn't come here but he would not tell me. Suffice to say, he said his friends did not like the decoration, or the people in the bar, and called it a: 'dump' and a: 'dive.' Although I never got to find meet his friends, similar attitudes were evident. Warren openly disliked the place, partly because of the interior, but also because of its parochial culture. He excluded himself because he wanted variety, and some 'class'. Because of

the underinvestment in the physical space, the bar had limited aesthetic appeal. Warren, who regularly went to London venues, disliked the dark and rundown atmosphere of the *Freelands*.

This leads on to issues of product differentiation and market segmentation, which appeared to operate in a contradictory way. On the one hand, the bar managers targeted (and received) a broad audience that was not exclusively gay. The managers performing their role, as 'good hosts', ensured that (almost) everyone was made welcome. For example, Fifi preferred the older people and objected to others calling them: 'coffin dodgers.' He said the old men (gay and straight) caused less trouble and were consistent customers, as opposed to younger boys and girls who were more inclined to go 'bar hopping'. Meanwhile, the managers used popular and recognisable symbols of gay identity to signify gay space, which had mixed results (see chapter 6). On the one hand, because it was the only gay venue in the area it attracted a broad gay consumer audience. Simultaneously, it used popularised and clichéd expressions of gay (male) identity, which then distanced many other consumers such as lesbians and older people. The place-image of the bar, either as a relatively undifferentiated hospitality venue, or as an eclectically constructed gay space, served as points of exclusion. As the crudely juxtaposed signs and the constantly reinvented notions of social order intermixed, there were always people who felt distanced from the perceived discourse of space. To my friends, sexual dissidence was the point of exclusion. For people like Mike and Simon it was not simply about being gay but being gay in a certain sort of way. Similarly, for Helen and Karen, it was about specific performances of male sexuality, which were reflected in performative practices. For Adrian, the point of distance was not *how* gay identities were performed but the very idea of having to be 'gay'. In certain situations, for people like Tom, the objection was about not being consistently gay enough. Some

consumers, like Warren argued that it was not simply the sexuality of the space but the physical attributes of the space, which reflected broader issues of taste.

Many people found it a novelty to have a gay bar so near to home, while others stayed away because it was too close to home. Dave explained that because he worked in the area, there was a constant risk of being recognised. For a long time he was wary of who saw him come and go and he had an alibi ready in case someone questioned why he went to the bar. Mike actually moved to the same street as the *Freelands* and constantly feared being seen by his wife. He said if he were ever confronted, he would say he: 'just came in to get some cigarettes.' This was particularly common among the older clientele, especially those who were not out in other areas in life.

The potential for exclusion was often constructed outside of, although in relation to, gay space. There was the potential for people to construct and maintain the boundaries and points of exclusion without having any direct contact with the social space. Often, it was enough to engage with specific myths associated with a cultural group.

Positional division and the material basis for exclusion

The previous section concentrated on the relationship between exclusion and social position. This social position referred to the relationship people shared with the various discourses of culture, and the extent to which they identified with these discourses. Throughout this discussion, the focus has been on admittance or exclusion based on access to (and the appropriate mobilisation of) various kinds of cultural, subcultural, social and aesthetic capital. There is also a need to address issues concerning access to economic capital and the potential for inclusion and exclusion. Again, we are confronted with complex networks of relationships as opposed to linear connections between economic capital and its effects. Access to economic capital obviously had

more immediate and apparent implications. However, these operated alongside the latent effect of socioeconomic position.

Access to the consumption environment was limited by the amount of money one had, although this was not as important here as it is elsewhere. Considering the prices of drinks, entrance fees, alongside the transport costs of getting to and from the venues, the *Freelands* was relatively accessible, as opposed to places in the city. In that sense, the access to capital did not represent a significant externally-oriented or inwardly-directed boundary. However, access to economic capital, and the subsequent ability to engage in reciprocal relationships, was important in determining proximity relationships and internally-organised boundaries. Buying drinks for someone was a good way to initiate or help a social encounter, although it did not guarantee anything:

A man told me to go over to another man on the other side of the bar and offer him a drink. The second man accepted, offered the first man a forced smile, and then turned around to make faces to the others around him. The first young man expected his gesture to be reciprocated by some gesture of friendliness, although it never came. Eventually the first man went up to the group of men and tried to make conversation, with limited success. They left separately.

As another example, Dave used his principal status to get drinks from more peripheral and isolated customers. On one night, when he was short of funds, he sat at the bar and persuaded Ken to buy him drinks. Dave did not like Ken and often made faces when he came in. Apart from a few token gestures of civility, Dave often ignored him. On this occasion, Dave persuaded Ken to buy him a drink although Dave did not then draw him into his conversations.

Within extended relationships, the failure to reciprocate these gestures was often noticed and emphasised. Failure to reciprocate was to neglect duty and obligation within the relationship (Mars 1987, Fox 1993). Kerri once referred to Paul as: 'Paul – I have never bought a drink in my life – Collins!' This was not the only reason why proximity relations became more distanced, but this reflected their increasing dissonance more acutely. However, as I illustrated earlier, with Liz and her networks of friends, reciprocity came in many forms. Limited access to capital did not stop people engaging in reciprocal relationships, but merely shifted the medium of exchange. Instead of buying drinks, Liz acted as an informal chauffeur. More importantly, as Hochschild (1983) argued, the exchange of feelings, whether emotional support, camaraderie, or respect, was an inherent part of friendships, and an important form of reciprocity.

Regarding economic capital, what was perhaps more important was the indirect link it had with access to educational, cultural and social capital. In effect, how a socio-economic (class-related) position influenced proximity relationships and the potential for exclusion. In chapter 5, I illustrated how limited access educational capital, which directly stemmed from a class position and habitus, could influence proximity relations. Harry's social repertoire was limited, and his ability to engage with certain others with a broader repertoire was constrained. Conversely, the perceived class distance also constrained Adrian's social mobility. At the opposite end of the spectrum to Harry, Adrian's repertoire was perceived to be limited because it was too esoteric for most other consumers.

There is one final part to the discussion on economic capital and its relationship with social position and proximity relations. Again, the issue is one I have highlighted in the previous chapters and primarily concerns access to aesthetic, social and subcultural capital. A comment I heard regularly was that in the London gay scene, if you had certain physical appeal then your social mobility was significantly increased. If you had

limited physical appeal, you could still enhance your aesthetic capital through clothing and accessories. This could be read as expensive ‘designer’ clothing, which was, of course, directly linked to access to economic capital. Limited access to one type of capital came to restrict access to other types of capital, which, in turn, acted as points of exclusion. However, within this social milieu, division on these grounds occurred at the interpersonal or inter-unit level. This was in contrast to venues such as the *Shadow Lounge* in London that place *visible* boundaries at the periphery of social space. In these venues, security staff monitor what people are wearing and whether it is appropriate for the place-image. The basis for exclusion in these types of ‘exclusive’ commercial spaces is firmly rooted in access to aesthetic and economic capital.

Conclusion

Boundaries do not simply exist at the edge of social space, inhibiting people from entering. If boundaries are understood as the practices of exclusion and distance in proximity relations, it is possible to see how they operate through social practices inside and outside hospitality ecologies. In part, boundaries surrounding the *Freelands* stemmed from the perceptions of belonging, or not. However, beyond the perceptual, which implies a psychological understanding, exclusion can be understood as visibly exercised power among networks of actors. In the Foucauldian sense, boundaries were the realisation or projection of force – actions that were supported by certain critical actors in the social milieu. The performative routines of hosts and guests, reflected in commonly repeated place-images and place-myths, helped reify these projections. Consequently, these projections informed and directed the social order of the hospitality space. This was achieved partly by excluding undesirables, but also by influencing and even ‘policing’ those participating.

Arguably, exclusionary strategies related to issues of property and propriety, so boundaries (as the exercise of power) became another prescriptive element within the performative. What one could do, how one could act, all drew from the practices of exclusion. Consequently, boundaries were inherently linked to notions of being, as both performance and identification. Certain performances of self were sanctioned and celebrated while others were suppressed and denied. Sometimes the visibility of boundaries resulted from the exercise of power, while at other times, from resistance to these strategies. Therefore, practices of exclusion, especially self-exclusion, reflect the positions of those seemingly reproducing or challenging certain possibilities of selfhood.

Notes

¹ See appendix a on the *Townhouse*.

Conclusion

Identities, or the processes of identification, reflect certain social positions; this much is obvious. Of course, the intentionality, or the subsequent perception of these acts of identification that position individuals is questionable. Nevertheless, the production and consumption of hospitality provides both the context and the means to articulate various identities. Within this thesis, I have focussed focused primarily on commercial contexts. However, the study demonstrated that the production and consumption of hospitality amalgamated private, social and commercial motivations or obligations. When Lashley drew the distinction between the three spheres of hospitality, he acknowledged the potential overlap between them. The case of the *Freelands* demonstrated how this overlap is in fact absolute interdependence; understanding one sphere was only possible by considering its relationship with the others.

Identities were entangled in every aspect of hospitality's production and consumption. Chapter 5 demonstrated how social positions frequently underpinned the nature of proximity relations. Issues of age, sex, sexuality, class position and access to economic and symbolic capital all served to define proximity relationships, which then defined hospitality exchanges. However, two important points must also be noted. First, it was necessary to consider these factors in relation to other environmental issues relating to physical ecology. Although the basis of social relationships cannot be accounted for in terms of physical ecology alone, chapter 5 argued that the physical size and layout of space critically influenced the nature of encounters. Second, while social positions remained visible in most social encounters, their significance shifted according to the social configuration. In line with Barth's (1969) 'transactional' analysis, chapter 5 repeatedly demonstrated that identification with individuals or social units was negotiated situationally. Supposedly unbridgeable divides according to class, age, sex or

sexuality were overcome as individuals found common interests. Consequently, as the *Piaf* case reflected, identities were contextualised (and continually recontextualised) as a perceived sense of mutuality underpinned feelings of affiliations and individuals identified with others.

Reciprocally, as chapter 7 in particular illustrated, hospitality exchanges simultaneously helped to define proximity relations and social positions. In developing specific types of host-guest and intra-guest relationships, certain consumers attained statuses that allowed them greater (or smaller) participation in the production and consumption of their hospitality space. Chapter 5 on proximity, and chapter 7 on social roles, set out how exchanges of social and material 'gifts' were employed in the construction of relationships. Some of these gifts or gestures: the exchange of drinks and drugs, sexual relations and the offer of emotional support were linked to interpersonal or social relationships. Other gifts or gestures: continued patronages, assistance with the service, the exchange of gossip and other information, and the maintenance of the social order also had a social aspect, but they were linked to the commercial organisation of hospitality. These were all examples of what I referred to in chapter 2 as the 'obligations of association'. What was interesting to note was how social obligations were often translated into obligations towards the commercial venture. I will return to this shortly.

In summary, networks of relationships helped to define, and were potentially defined by, acts of hospitality. Hospitality exchanges reflected statuses and social positions that distinguished who could, or could not, participate. More importantly, this simultaneously helped establish codes that determined the form and character of individual participation. Chapter 6 on myths reflected how hosts and guests recreated and mobilised certain knowledges concerning notions of commonality, mutual safety and the potential to consume the very sociality of hospitality. The subsequent chapters on social roles and boundaries illustrated how these knowledges were reproduced

through *near-institutionalised* performance of selves. These clearly reflected certain expectations from hosts and guests as they collectively produced and consumed the hospitality ecology. The term 'near-institutionalised' reflects Hochschild's (1983) arguments concerning emotional labour. The identities of those producing the experience of hospitality, both hosts and guests' alike, were directly linked to an organisational and commercial agenda. The organisational viability of the hospitality space relied on 'appropriate' embodied performances of selves. Chapter 7 on social roles emphasised the role of mutual awareness and the purposive presentations of selves within 'imagined communities' or networks that served to perpetuate the reproduction of these social units. Meanwhile, chapter 8 on boundaries simultaneously reflected the role of exclusion in reproducing notions of commonality, or in some cases, how people identified themselves in opposition to certain collectively maintained values.

The owners/managers employed specific discourses of identity as a way to define their target market. Within the *Freelands*, the management not only drew on, but also emphasised particular aspects of identity and then employed this as part of a conscious marketing strategy. Arguably, when the owners decided to open a 'gay bar', they intended to capitalise on a potential market niche, which indicates a financial motive on their part; however, even here the social and private aspects of hospitality were implicitly mobilised. What I referred to in chapter 2 as the 'basis of association': notions of sexual dissidence, commonality, association, belongingness, safety, and of course, predictability, were already implicated in the creation of 'gay space'. Here, predictability refers to the use of specific signifying practices that became the semiotic basis for the formation of neo-tribes (or an identifiable market niche). These signifying practices drew on a mix of market-led expectations of what [gay] people did, wore, looked at, drank, bought and the music they consumed.

As chapter 6 demonstrated, groups of signifiers operated 'directly', 'referentially' and 'reflectively' in constructing semiotic realities that participants and observers could find intelligible. I argued that objects such as rainbow flags or specific genres of music were clear examples of mnemonic practices within a 'dialogic memory' (Olick 1999, chapter 2). These drew on the specific cultural knowledge, awareness and involvement of observers and participants. Guiding perceptions and the processes of recollection, helped to reproduce collective ideologies and understandings. This again, highlighted the importance of ideologies as collectively held and reproduced sets of knowledges and values within hospitality space.

Within the *Freelands*, ideologies acted as the fundamental basis for the formation of neo-tribes or *communitas*. However, this brings us back to a number of questions I raised in chapter 2 concerning the relationship between social organisation and ideology. More specifically, if a sense of commonality was an ideological stance, then did ideologies remain constant or resilient? This would imply that social forms changed according to the ideological basis of the social unit. If this was the case, how were ideological beliefs reproduced and regulated to ensure their consistency? Alternatively, did ideological forms emerge in order to consolidate the positions of hosts and guests?

Some ideologies emerged because of particular social relationships within the hospitality context and not the other way around. Arguably, the hosts pursued their own personal goals by producing commonly held understandings. This required the hosts to construct particular bases of association that were accompanied by specific obligations of association.

There were certain aspects of ideology that had an historic presence outside of this particular context. These were issues of sexual dissidence and citizenship concerning self-expression, self-definition and rights within social institutions (Richardson 2000a).

These remained constant, as far as sexual dissidents have remained excluded and

potentially disenfranchised. As chapter 6 on myths argued, this formed the ideological basis for collective organisation. However, as the chapters on proximity and myths also demonstrated, these were not unified ideologies and it was important to recognise the importance of localised and individual interests. Individuals were drawn together to form networks of relationships; the more coherent these networks, the more those participating in these networks or units could pursue common goals. However, in order to function as a collective entity, there was a need for some negotiation among networks of actors. These negotiations were primarily concerned with the performance of individual identities in relation to the perceived identities of others in the social unit or networks. Simultaneously, this also relied on the ability to mobilise appropriate kinds of economic and symbolic capital.

It was important to recognise that ideologies were constantly rearticulated in the process of their translation. This is best illustrated by examining how translation operated within the broader organisational framework of the *Freelands* and its holding company.

The organisation was characterised by underinvestment and chronic ad hocism; consequently, the viability of the commercial organisation related directly to the nature of social organisation. It would have been practically impossible, and certainly unprofitable, to run the bar completely legally. To begin with, managers were the only employees officially paid to work there and all staff were subcontracted by them, at their own expense. If the manager or manageress opted to keep the money, they regularly had to work long hours behind the bar, in addition to their administrative and cleaning tasks.

Simultaneously, the long-term rental of the venue was not tied to any significant investment that would assure the sustainability of the venture. For example, I highlighted in chapter 3 how the decoration of the pub relied on the initiative (and narcotic consumption) of the *Freelands*' staff. In short, management short-termism

directly undermined the financial viability of the venture. Consequently, the lack of economic capital needed to maintain this venture was substituted by the mobilisation of cultural and social capital.

Hosts relied on the support of guests to sustain the basic operation. 'Nurturing' close proximity relationships between host and guest, through personal exchanges of hospitality, enabled the host to mobilise an unpaid and seemingly invisible labour-force. The organisational culture, especially at the operational level, was characterised by a blurring between role differentiation and divisions of labour. This blurring of role differentiation extended to both host and guest. In other words, the guests frequently assumed responsibility for the organisation of the *Freelands* as both commercial and social space. In part, this was the result of the size of the place and the 'nurtured' proximity relations between host and guest. This was also very much dependent on the continually practiced myths of commonality, safety and play, which directly related to the ideological foundations of the hospitality space.

In part, the myths of commonality were drawn from continually reasserted performative and semiotic practices of both hosts and guests. Simultaneously, as chapters 2 and 6 highlighted, these also relied on representations of groups and their associated spaces. Perceptions of gay people and gay spaces directly contributed to perceptions of the *Freelands*. This relationship was conceptualised through Lefebvre's spatial dialectic of representational spaces and representations of space. Representations operated alongside the 'lived-experience' of consumption and it was often difficult to separate what was lived and what was represented. The potential formation of Maffesolian neo-tribes was dependent on the ability to engage with each other *directly* (through interactional routines), and *indirectly* (through representational practices). However, as the issue of 'camp' demonstrated, there was already a collapse between the 'performed self' and representations of what gay selves are supposed to be.

I sought to understand how lived experience became infused with sophisticated representational practices through Bakhtin's notion of 'genres' (chapter 2). Lived experience, as primary genres, relied on reflexivity and strategic practices of categorisation, as it became patterned cultural practice. After all, participants were, to some extent at least, mutually aware of other would-be participants in a subculture. When cultural participants or commentators incorporated broader mediating forces, they became secondary complex genres. These came to influence primary genres and the everyday lived experience by producing commonly understood moral and aesthetic codes.

In the case of the *Freelands*, the myths of commonality extended from sexuality as a common theme. In its broadest sense, sexual dissidence had the potential to include a wide range of people. However, in practice, these myths of commonality often referred to highly regulated beliefs and expectations concerning the performances of sexual selves. Camp performances, innuendoes and constant sexual references were clear reflections of how popularised complex genres were mobilised in the production of gay space. These performances, and the knowledges bound up within these performances, formed the ideological basis for identification with certain individuals, social units and networks.

The myths of safety extended from these myths of commonality. In identifying with notions of sexual dissidence, consumers engaged in the production of their collective safe space. Of course (as chapters 6 and 8 demonstrated), not everybody felt the need to produce these safe spaces. For some, especially those who felt alienated from stereotypical genres of gay culture, gay spaces presented considerable tensions; simultaneously, the notions of delineated 'safe space' were perceived by some to perpetuate marginalisation. Nevertheless, it remained a constantly repeated theme among hosts and guests. For both men and women the production of a gay hospitable

space was implicitly tied to rejections to heteronormative power relations – the potential rejection of culturally defined expectations of how males and females are expected to behave. This relied on creating and maintaining separations that allowed commonality to materialise. Of course, this separation was not created within the *Freelands*. The ubiquity of heterosexuality, the ‘othering’ of sexual dissidence, and the potential threats of violence reemphasised such separation. Nevertheless, how this separation was employed in the construction of the social space by both hosts and guests was important, and I will return to this shortly.

The myths of play drew on the understandings or myths of commonality and safety in producing a space of supposed allowance. The myths of play referred to the potential for individuals to experiment and engage in what Turner (1982) referred to as ‘liminoid’ forms of consumption. The experience was often reliant upon the co-presence of others and a certain degree of cooperation between them. At the very least, this may have just been people occupying the physical space so people did not consume alone. On other occasions, the interaction was more active and acute, where people literally consumed each other’s company. When individuals engaged with others, opportunities existed for *communitas* to form. Liminality as the practice of emancipation through experimentation became a central part of the consumption experience. This was especially true in the case of parties and celebrations, which were commonly recognised as carnivalesque points in time and space that allowed for intensive forms of play.

The myths of play reinforced the myths of commonality and safety by emphasising separation and liminality. As much as these *were* lived, they were also used to create and reinforce the belief that they *could* be lived, especially within this space. The myths of play reflected the vibrancy of the consumption experience. As such, they were needed to recreate constantly the physical space as a certain kind of (sexualised) social space.

The *Temple* drew on similar notions of separation and liminality while presenting the place-image of a playful consumption experience. Interestingly both the *Freelands* and the *Temple* reflected a certain degree of uniqueness while simultaneously drawing on pre-existing common themes. The socio-spatial locations certainly supported these images of uniqueness, which in turn reflected the usefulness of the ecological metaphor. For the *Freelands*, the common theme was the notion of a communal dissident space within a heterosexual topography. Meanwhile, for the *Temple*, the commonality was partly drawn from national identities set against a discursive topography of Englishness or 'Europeanism'. More importantly, both venues existed as liminal spaces within moral topographies. If public space reflects certain moral expectations concerning the performances or presentations of selves, the *Freelands* and the *Temple* were distinctly antithetic moral spaces. They presented themselves as distinctive within certain socio-spatial, socio-political or even moral topographies, although their dissident connotations were no means exclusive. After all, they drew on well-established genres that operated elsewhere in other gay spaces, or other venues catering for antipodeans.

Resistance became another experience to be produced and consumed within the hospitality context. Liminality in terms of marginal geographies of consumption was clearly promoted in both hospitality spaces. Because of their conscious effort to emphasise their marginal status, both the *Freelands* and the *Temple* 'allowed' certain behaviours to be performed. This allowed certain identities to be articulated. However, the performances of identity were regulated, sometimes through overt coercive means, as in the case of the *Temple* (see chapter 3 in particular), but more often, through subtle regulatory practices (chapter 7). Moreover, notions of identity and identification became discourses to be strategically employed or deployed in order to maintain the commercial venture. The myths of commonality, safety and the potential for play were ideologies to be purposefully reproduced by participants and observers alike.

Arguably, consumer freedom within these hospitality contexts was a fictional indulgence. Moving from one social space to another simply meant exchanging certain forms of control and manipulation for others. For example, the boundaries associated with a 'liberated space' such as the *Freelands* became another component of the production/consumption process. The processes of inducement directed insiders into maintaining the social order and exclude those who would or could potentially undermine it. A similar situation existed in the *Temple* where certain moral codes were suspended, only to be replaced by other forms of directed behaviour. The irony here was that supposedly orgiastic and liberated performances of self were still highly regulated performative routines. The production and consumption of hospitality space drew on the performative obligations of participants. In both cases, consumers were never liberated but received illusory opportunities to produce and consume in a social space where certain regulatory practices appeared to be negotiable.

Certain people found the *Freelands* to be a site for self-expression. However, for others, the *Freelands* represented new forms of repressive tendencies. This was not just about ghettoising sexuality or the 'containment' of sexual dissidents in marginal geographies; repression here refers to the potential to *have to* reproduce certain performances of identities in order to participate. Naturally, not everyone felt the need to identify with either hosts or other guests, or provide any sort of emotional labour. However, those consumers who identified with others, and engaged in appropriate proximity relations with hosts and guests, often had increased opportunities to project their influence over the space; they could treat the *Freelands* as home territory, with their deviances or transgressions increasingly tolerated.

I argued that identity performance, social position and representation were also about the circulation of capital. The production and consumption of hospitality space directly relied on the mobilisation of economic capital. In chapter 6, I argued that financial

invisibility reflected a sense of powerlessness in terms of social space; this was certainly the case among female and especially lesbian consumers. However, for some of the *Freelands*' female consumers, those who engaged in appropriate social exchanges of hospitality, and 'nurtured' proximity relations, the mobilisation of social capital compensated for the lack of economic capital. Where the lack of economic capital was not compensated for by appropriate forms of social capital, this reinforced social invisibility or marginality.

There is an additional point to be made here on the role of the body and aesthetic capital. Social inclusion and access to social capital relied on culturally or subculturally constructed notions of physical ideals. Chapter 5 argued that those with appropriate looks had increased social mobility. In addition, clothing (which may of course be a reflection of access to economic capital) enhanced physical appeal, or even compensated for the lack of such appeal. Access to one sort of capital (aesthetic) thus offered access to others sorts of capital (social). Just as I argued above, this social capital, acquired through access to aesthetic capital, could compensate for the lack of economic capital. Furthermore, as chapter 7 argued, the aesthetic capital of hosts and guests was mobilised and appropriated by those managing the hospitality experience.

Mobilised capital helped entangle the various contexts of hospitalities. The knowledge, capabilities and resources of the consumer segments were appropriated and employed by the commercial venture's operators. By targeting a market niche, the operators of the *Freelands* (and the *Temple*) were able to draw upon and mobilise *strong mythologies*. Arguably, all hospitality venues have certain perceptions or knowledges associated with them. However, the level of coherence and consistency in the articulation or practice of these knowledges, determines the strength of the myths. For example, people may recognise a brand or know a venue to be a clean or friendly bar, with regular drinks

promotions. These may be consistently articulated understandings (or myths) surrounding that place.

There is perhaps a need to draw an artificial divide between *product oriented* or *social/experientially oriented* myths. Product oriented myths refer to the specific functional aspect of the commercial hospitality spaces. The significance of location, the range and quality of the food or drinks, or even pricing are prime examples of these.

The *Freelands* certainly had homogenous or strong sets of beliefs surrounding the product. The late lock-ins and geographical convenience of its location were the basis for its strong product oriented mythological tradition. The visible appeal of male bar-staff was also part of the product, although this also related to the social experience of consumption. The aesthetic capital of the labour force became another commodity within the production process; 'the body' had exchange values within the commercial experience of hospitality as it served the social expectations of that consumer niche (see chapter 7).

Finally, elements like the cleanliness of the bar, the quality and price of drinks, the choice of music, and the aesthetic properties of the milieu were also part of this mythological tradition. People's opinions concerning the standard of these things were more heterogeneous. For some, especially the older customers, the *Freelands* represented the familiarity and 'charm' of a local bar. For other, mainly younger clients, this 'charm' was perceived as regression, reflecting a lack of economic or cultural capital.

The *Temple* had similar strong myths surrounding its product: the sawdust on the floor and the drinks served in bags all gave a clear indication what people should expect. This is not to imply this was perceived as value for money; many informants commented that paying £6 entry and then another £7 for three canned drinks was a lot to pay. However, these offered clear expectations of the product. More importantly, these perceptions of

the product were directly linked to the social or experiential myths of the experience as liminal and carnivalesque.

Social/experiential myths refer to the sociality of commercial hospitality space. The *Freelands* also had a strong set of socially oriented myths associated with it. The myths of commonality, safety and play formed a considerable part of both the bar's image, and its social appeal; expressions of collectivity formed a significant part of the consumption experience. The management's ability to draw on these notions of social association provided a number of significant market opportunities. First, this allowed the operators to focus in on a niche market, which had certain marketing advantages; this enabled them to communicate with consumer groups through niche media and social networks already drawing on common interests. Furthermore, the sense of common interest meant the bar could operate with this level of minimal investment and ad hoc organisation because the hosts could mobilise the labour of the guests so they helped produce their own experience.

The *Temple* clearly had strong experiential myths associated with it. Drinking, self-exposure and other deviant behaviours obviously reflected similar myths of play. Again, myths of commonality underpinned these myths of play. Common national identities, visibly performed against other national identities, were produced alongside performances of moral dissidence.

Lastly, the body also forms a part of social/experiential myths. In the *Freelands*, both hosts and guests became the embodied manifestation of social values, where gestures and body shapes signified gay space. Furthermore, within the *Temple* and the *Freelands*, the body was spectacularised and the sexualised body became the object of consumption through the gaze. Meanwhile the body was the site of consumption through the embodied actions of drinking, dancing, talking, laughing and touching.

Hosts and guests celebrated this orgiastic consumption of the body, through the body, and it became part of the place-myths surrounding both spaces.

My argument assumes that hospitality spaces with low levels of commitment reflect *weak mythologies*. The heterogeneity of the consumers means multiple and constantly shifting understandings surrounding space. The potential weakness of associated myths stems from the heterogeneity of possible perceptions and interpretations. These may be overcome by specific marketing or management strategies. In terms of product-oriented understandings, the bar may offer and advertise food or drinks promotions. Similarly, an organisation may attempt to construct stronger socially oriented myths surrounding a venue through focused marketing campaigns. However, if these myths and understandings are not reified or 'enacted' by the guests, they can only be perpetuated through continuous marketing.

This is not meant to imply that spaces have singular place-images or myths projected over them. All commercial hospitality venues are contested spaces, and have a range of myths associated with them. Some will be more heterogeneous (weak myth clusters) while others will be relatively homogenous and more frequently cited (strong myth clusters). The importance lies in how homogenous myths are created and practiced through the consumption experience.

The *Freelands* and *Temple* cases demonstrated the ongoing processes of translations or articulation where certain sets of myths came to be practiced. In effect, the continued practices of certain social or experientially oriented myths reflected the existence of certain networks of relationships. As I noted above, people with compatible interests and values formed social units and networks. The coherence of these networks was reflected in the common practice of certain myths (understandings and values shared by those participating). These myths were produced and reproduced through performative practices and representations of those practices as primary and secondary genres.

By hybridising the private, social and commercial aspects of hospitality, these hospitality spaces became the potential site of strong myths, and the practice of strong myths. However, as I highlighted earlier, what was particularly interesting was how interpersonal and social relationships were entangled with the commercial interests. I have argued that the mobilisation and articulations of myths for commercial gains could be understood through the notion of *inducement*. Inducement reflected the purposive transformation of Turner's spontaneous *communitas* into normative *communitas*. It operated through subtle hegemonic mechanisms of encouragement and enticement, linked to specific incentives. I argued that inducement functioned differently to coercion, although both reflected the exercise of power. The practices of inducement operated primarily through Foucauldian panopticism where the nature of participation was defined and regulated by existing networks of participants. Potential membership represented a willingness to 'buy into' ideological discourses where individual identity was subordinated, to some extent, to social identity. Therefore, participation coincided with certain subject positions.

These subject positions were reinforced by a number of social and political forces, often external to the hospitality context. The first was the process of 'othering', which at once separated and created classificatory labels. It was here that individuals became the subjects of classificatory practices. The labels of dissidence were then used to create discourses of mutuality between individuals. The *Freelands* reflected othering based primarily on sexuality, whereas the *Temple* demonstrated the importance of nationality. In both cases, the ideological notions of collectivity sustained these 'others' as a consumer group. However, in the *Freelands*, notion of 'strength in visible numbers' also had the potential to mobilise consumers as a political entity. Finally, participants in these social ventures reinforced certain cultural and ideological values through mutual

self-reference and self-surveillance. This was simultaneously translated into actions within hospitality spaces.

In other words, to have a social space people must come along and continue to be lesbian, gay or even antipodean there; it was in their interest to come and patronise these places *and* for that patronage to take certain forms. For these spaces to exist, as social ventures, consumers were encouraged to consume there. More importantly, the consumers were 'employed' to help produce both the social space and the overall experience. Behaving in certain ways, performing certain social rituals (including participating in the provision of entertainment), spreading information about the place, bringing others along, helping to 'direct' the behaviour of others, and maintaining necessary points of exclusion, all reflected the role of consumers as producers of their space. This was about producing specific versions of space, versions that reflected certain ideological constructs; I define this as 'inducement'.

Guests were expected to contribute their emotional labour in order for their social space to function as a consumable experience. Culturally specific knowledge and social relations had exchange values within the production and consumption process. This was not just about commodification of the social experience, but commodification of the consumer. Just as guests have specific obligations towards their hosts in private hospitality contexts, consumers began to have obligations towards the producers and other consumers.

Even more interesting was how the roles of the consumers as producers extended beyond the immediate experience of hospitality space. Both the *Freelands* and the *Temple* cases illustrated the way consumers became critical agencies of marketing communication. I do not simply mean that consumers disseminated information, although the role of consumers as transmitters was essential. These roles were infinitely more important. In contemporary society, people are constantly bombarded with

information about places and experiences of consumption. Therefore, specific individuals become simultaneous 'filter-broadcast' agents – partly in passing on specific information to certain kinds of people, but also acting as instigators in getting them directly involved. Consumers no longer just provide income through their consumption of hospitality; they generate income through their production of hospitality.

Simultaneously to acting as gatekeepers, there was also an ideological indoctrination taking place. The narrative accounts of places from existing participants established expectations and provided subtle instructions. The ideological basis of social organisation within the hospitality context was clearly reproduced through this process. Again, this was a reflection of how the 'dialogic memory' operated in reproducing the ideological dimensions of the hospitality experience.

I appreciate this makes the participation in specific neo-tribes or *communitas* seem like recruitment into a cult or a sect, although the sect analogy is not far-removed. A cult represents devotion to a particular set of ideological beliefs, which instructs certain performances of self. Sects are analogous to cults although the emphasis is placed on separation, fragmentation and the formation of factions. The sect is a hybridised entity, which already draws on some 'other', from which it deviates or rejects in its creation.

I am not implying that all hospitality contexts have sect-like associations, but where strong mythological clusters function, these serve as the ideological basis for *proto-sects*. A proto-sect represents networks of association based on ideological groundings. Individual identity is caught up in a dialogic relationship with the identity of other participants as they attempt to reify their networks. It represents a constant process of faction-ing and fracturing where shifting configurations of individuals form new networks of association.

I have argued that in order to understand shifting networks we must ask *why* certain people associated with each other and *how* social organisation was 'managed'. 'Why'

refers to the *basis* of association, whereas the 'how' to the *obligations* of association. This is concerned with the necessary conditions for the existence of these networks, and the requirements from individuals wishing to participate.

The focus so far has been on the centripetal forces that served to bring people together. However, the study also demonstrated that centrifugal forces had equally significant functions within the production and consumption of hospitality. Maffesoli and Turner tend to ignore issues of incoherence and fracturing when they emphasise the inclusive character of neo-tribes and *communitas*. I believe that exclusion and fractioning were fundamental aspects of hospitality as both social experience and commercial venture. This became evident in a number of ways.

First, 'public' space reflected specific discourses of heterosexuality, morality and nationality that suggested 'civilised' social identities or presentations of self. The private and parochial social orders of these hospitality ecologies were produced in opposition to these public social orders. As I have already noted, exclusion and separation was an inherent character of these supposedly liminal spaces and a key attraction of the experience.

Second, I have already discussed how certain factions reflected specific ideological positions; exclusion or distance signified those who identified with these positions, and those who did not. On one level, this meant the exclusion of those who could not appropriately engage with the myths associated with the hospitality space. Within the *Freelands* this primarily referred to homophobic people, or those who could not engage with certain versions of sexual dissidence. Chapter 8 illustrated how exclusion was partly achieved through the control over the visibility. The use of blinds, the absence of overt signifiers outside of the building, and the limited channels of advertising about the *Freelands* were examples of what I referred to as 'externally-oriented boundaries'.

Chapter 8 also demonstrated the importance of ‘inwardly-directed boundaries’ where individuals excluded themselves, which in turn reflected their sense of identification. Simultaneously, even when people consumed within the hospitality space, ‘internally-organised boundaries’ excluded people from engaging with certain individuals and units. In part, these could be explained in terms of individual choices where people felt distanced from others. Chapter 5 illustrated how individual biographies, shared histories, alongside representations of ‘people of that sort’ often explained dissonance. However, boundaries also reflected the potential access to, and the ability to mobilise, appropriate economic, social, cultural and aesthetic capital. These points of dissension, linked to social position and identification, critically influenced consequent hospitality exchanges within the *Freelands*.

The employment of boundaries and points of division were also evident within the *Temple*. The management’s objection to a formal interview appeared to be a critical externally-oriented boundary that reflected the self-imposed marginality of the *Temple*. More importantly, many Australians, New Zealanders and South Africans living in London knew about the *Temple*. Even the Australians that visited the *Freelands* had heard of it. However, people frequently disassociated themselves from the expressions of moral values, and the national, class and sexual identities evident in the *Temple*. These were clear reflections of inwardly-directed boundaries.

Inside the *Temple*, people continually articulated positions of identification in relation to discourses of nationality and sexuality that were analogous to internally-organised boundaries. The collective expressions of national or gender affiliation during the roll calls illustrated the relationship between strategies of division and identification. The visible articulation of these oppositional identities became a large part of the consumption experience. Simultaneously, people expressed more immediate proximity relationships and specifically rooted forms of association or disassociation. These

subject positions were in relation to individuals or particular social units, with rugby teams being obvious examples. Therefore, identification operated through similar internal boundaries and proximity relationships highlighted in the *Freelands*. However, because of the temporary nature of the experience, public biography and extended mutual knowledge of each other may not have played the same significant role in exclusion or inclusion.

Both cases clearly illustrate that people consumed the very acts of exclusion. The potential to produce and consume social space, and the social experience of bound up in that space, relied on distinction and exclusion. If we consider the fragmentation and reconfiguration of social relationships and identities in the broader societal context, hospitality spaces provided both the context and process to assert new forms of selves. However, being and doing was implicitly tied to not being someone and not doing something else. Asserting points of inclusion, where individual and neo-tribal identities were realised, directly relied on exclusion to exist.

Where do we go from here?

I originally assumed my audience would be hospitality academics and I sought to challenge the scope of hospitality research alongside the methodologies employed. My dialogue is still primarily with hospitality academics although my conclusions extend to the disciplines of social science. Therefore, the first part of this concluding section is aimed at a broader academic audience, while the second, more specifically at hospitality academics.

Contributions to a research agenda for social scientists

It is clear that understanding the forms of hospitality among people helps to understand the nature of the social bonds between them. Therefore, instead of seeing hospitality studies as an appendage to cultural studies, or far worse, dismissing it as the study of the business of hospitality, it is worthwhile examining how culture emerges through hospitality. The ecological analysis developed here makes this possible.

In short, the ecological approach connects social actions to places and maps the relationship between social actions, broader societal forces and space. I pursued this analysis by considering four areas of inquiry: first, the basis of social relationships; second, the role of common knowledge; third, the significance of human agency; and finally, the role of boundaries and exclusion. I will consider each of these areas in turn.

First, within the study of proximity, myths and social roles, I examined the mechanics of hospitality exchange at the smallest social level. In doing so, I demonstrated how widely recognised cultural values could be analysed by examining how they were (re)produced within everyday hospitality ecologies. Meanwhile, I illustrated how these exchange relationships were tied to broader social issues. Consequently, the study of culture was rooted in the mundane although it was not limited to it. Exchange relations were interpreted in relation to the broader social-political framework in which they were entangled.

The analysis of proximity relations and hospitality exchange also contributes to a social-psychological understanding of cultural formation. In particular, the study demonstrated how perceptions of social units, and the perceived values of those involved, come to influence the participation of others. These values were directly reflected in the spaces people inhabited and the rituals of hospitality exchanges in which they were involved.

The analysis entangled the identities and social positions of those participating in, and

of those observing the social units. I questioned *what* happened, but more importantly, the basis for *why* something may happen in the future.

Second, I considered how commonly produced understandings (myths) inform social relations and hospitality exchanges, while demonstrating that myths emerged because of those exchanges. Again, the everyday realm was understood in terms of representational practices, movements of capital and assertions of power that were not located in the immediate. Instead, using the notion of genres, I demonstrated how the mundane directly informs what is at the societal level and vice versa. The usefulness of this analysis of myths was that it examined the *hows* and *whys* of social phenomena at different scales while relating it to everyday contexts.

Here the problems of myths and mythology are taken out of the exalted anthropological context and brought into a contemporary realm. Myths exist in the profane everyday world, often devoid of ritual; yet myths, as defined here, continue to remerge and inform our social realities (see chapters 2 and 6). As anthropologists seek to contribute to broader social, economic, political and commercial debates, this study of myths provides an opportunity for the discipline to engage with a wider audience.

Third, I demonstrated the importance of human agency in producing the contexts for, and reproducing the processes of, cultural formation through hospitality. I developed the idea of a social order and examined how the ideological principles of social orders were perpetuated through the notion of embodied performance. Moreover, I examined how the body became central to producing and consuming hospitality.

The body reflected the perceived values of those involved; in particular, bodily ideals reflected status within (sub)culturally determined hierarchies. Meanwhile the body became the physical site of consumption of alcohol, drugs and physical contact, and as it was objectified and consumed through the gaze. In displaying, indulging and evaluating bodies, they became a critical part of the experience of hospitality.

Understanding the role of the body in the production and consumption of hospitality offered insight into broader social and cultural values that influence interpretations of embodied actions. Moreover, it is critical to emphasise that those participating were not passive carriers, but active transmitters of knowledge. Within hospitality exchanges, embodied actions had transformative potential as certain values were strengthened and thus legitimised, while others were undermined and weakened.

The usefulness of this analysis of agency lies in two areas: first, the argument does not rely on theoretical abstraction but is grounded in context; and second, it demonstrates how schisms operate within this process. New hybrid versions of culture are created within reproduction as people reinterpret existing ideals and create potentially unique cultural expressions.

Within my research, the analysis of human agency focussed on organisational settings, although a similar analysis is equally applicable in social contexts. However, considering organisational contexts is particularly useful because it helps to appreciate how commercial agendas intersect with social and political ones. The importance of this commercial slant in understanding social formations is something I will return to shortly.

Fourth, all the lines of inquiry emphasised the critical role of division and separation in cultural formation. Within the analysis of proximity relations, myths and social roles, division reflects different social positions. Following Barth (1969) and Eidheim's (1969, 1971) 'transactional' approach to culture and identity, cultural values manifest themselves as people reproducing one set of principles come into conflict with others embodying differing ideals. Consequently, mutuality and common interest are defined through opposition. These notions of difference and exclusion help to define the characteristics of a social order; it sheds light on how and why certain versions of

culture are celebrated and re-emerge more frequently while others are marginalised or exorcised.

Exclusion is not a by-product of social inclusion but central to it and hospitality plays a critical role. Social positions are reflected in, and defined by, who can be involved in hospitality exchange and how they participate. Consequently, examining the symbolic and material basis of these exchange relations, alongside the outcomes of these relations, reveals the cultural ties that underpin social networks.

The importance of identity, status and the problems of social organisation are entangled in all these lines of analysis. Where we belong and how we articulate our position in relation to networks or imagined communities is a fluid, dialogic process. Within this ecological analysis, culture is not reduced to a simplified apprehendable entity; instead, culture is seen as a series of possibilities. By examining the basis and the processes of cultural formation, it is possible to examine why and how some formations are possible while others are denied or constrained.

Social scientists can draw on this ecological approach and examine the spatialised nature of hospitality in order to understand problems of identity and social organisation.

I have argued that hospitality spaces provide the contexts for the articulation of identities. Furthermore, hospitality exchanges are the processes that not only help articulate identities and social positions, but also reaffirm the social significance of hospitality spaces. In light of this, perhaps the nature of hospitality relationships should be *the* starting point for social scientists if they wish to examine a culture or subculture.

I appreciate that anthropologists have been pursuing a similar goal since the nineteenth century. However, where anthropology has traditionally concentrated on archaic societies in distant places, it seems useful to apply this kind of focus to contemporary urban contexts. This is especially true when we recognise that the problems of who we are and where we belong have become increasingly important. The blurring of national,

ethnic and cultural boundaries, and the continuous movement of people, has led to an increased sense of disorientation. Consequently, defining identities or communities is a permanent pursuit. Notions of neo-tribes, *communitas* and networks help to address these problems. However, the ecological analysis proposed here acts as a conceptual tool where the intricate mechanics of this kind of social organisation can be understood. Moreover, although the scope of such research is social, it is important to recognise that commercial hospitality spaces are a fundamental part of sociality. Partly as society shifts towards the service economy and people increasingly work within service occupations, but also as leisure consumption becomes part of everyday social life and a reflection of citizenship. Therefore, whether hospitality is treated as work or leisure, studies of culture can approach hospitality spaces as central sites where people negotiate and assert who they are as individuals and groups.

This relationship between hospitality and identity was clearly reflected in the examination of sexuality. This in turn offered a broader understanding of sexuality. More specifically, it revealed that notions of sexuality are inseparably entangled with notions of cultural identity.

Being lesbian or gay is essentially defined by whether someone feels any sort of emotional or sexual attraction towards someone of the same sex. However, as the study demonstrated, sexual identity cannot be reduced to this alone. Instead, sexual identities emerge as a series of social positions or lifestyle choices, and hospitality ecologies act as key sites where these identities are produced. People's sexuality often materialised as they reproduced speech acts and bodily performances that corresponded to certain expectation of how gay men and women behave. Wearing certain brands or types of clothing, listening to specific genres of music or acting 'camp' among gay males clearly reflected this. Within certain sexualised hospitality ecologies, these selves are celebrated and encouraged. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that sexuality was not simply

about whether someone liked people of the same sex, but about how they participated in the dissident subcultures. This in turn was reflected in how they participated in hospitality ecologies: how they engaged in exchange relationships and how they reproduced (negotiated or resisted) the social order. Consequently, understanding the nature and contexts of hospitality provides a broader understanding of sexuality where sexuality is not reduced to a series of sexual acts. Instead, sexuality manifests itself as complex lifestyle choices and social positions through the production and consumption of hospitality space.

Having outlined some themes for cultural studies, I will turn my attention to hospitality studies and hospitality management. However, the themes I have considered relevant to social scientists reemerge as important themes for hospitality academics.

Contributions to a research agenda for hospitality studies

Perhaps the most important theme to emerge was the need to develop a holistic understanding of how hospitality is produced and consumed. Commercial hospitality cannot be reduced to any single aspect of its production/consumption, i.e., the quality of the food or drink, the ambiance of the ecology in which it is consumed or the nature of the service encounter. Hospitality must be seen in terms of the total experience. Again, the usefulness of the ecological approach is that it identifies complex networks of relationships between what is involved in the existential sense, and the social, economic and political factors that frame and work through the experience.

Conceptually, the usefulness of this approach is in its focus on the processes that create the experience. It asks why the experience of hospitality takes specific forms in certain contexts. This is made possible by considering the social positions of both producer and consumer, and their potential motivations and opportunities for engaging in that

experience. Despite the importance placed on the drinks supplied, the prices charged, or the venue itself, the cases demonstrated that hospitality is essentially a social experience. The challenge now is to examine critically how the private and social aspects of hospitality, concerning identity, identification, status, and belongingness, are implicated as universals in other commercial hospitality contexts.

I have argued that understanding the organisational aspects of commercial hospitality is only made possible by understanding the most intimate of social relations and interactions. Naturally, these relations operate through complex representations and the movements of capital. The organisation of hospitality involves the management of these intimate and often informal encounters. Simultaneously, 'management' involves the potential direction of how these experiences are represented. These representations create expectations for potential participants, thus helping to predetermine the nature of the experience.

The difficulty in presenting such a research agenda to many hospitality academics is their apparent fixation with the visible and formal management of the commercial product. Instead, what is important is the informal nature of the experience. These ambiguous concepts often cannot be addressed using reductive, positivistic methods but rely on contextualised and intimate understandings of the hospitality encounter.

The case of the *Freelands* in particular demonstrated that elaborate promotions, professional training or formally developed management systems did not create the experience. The experience was 'managed' through informal relationships, through individual performances of identities or presentations of selves within microcosms of power.

Issues of sex and sexuality were clear examples of these informal relationships. Sexuality was a key element within the *Freelands* as the sexualised bodies of hosts and guests became aesthetic capital, and as its exchange value became a commodity to be

produced and consumed as part of the experience. More importantly, sex (observation as voyeurism or the potential participation in sexual acts) was a critical element in the experience. Arguably, when operators or managers hire attractive service staff, they are attempting to appropriate, employ or deploy sex and sexuality within the hospitality experience. However, the 'courting rituals' between hosts and guests, and among guests themselves, are managed outside of any formalised service relationship.

Similarly, it has become evident that the hospitality experience often operates through deliberately marginal or at least ambiguous moral and legal relationships. Certainly, within the *Freelands*, the experience was implicitly tied to liminal moralities set against dominant codes of sexual conduct and gender roles. Consequently, if hospitality ecologies are considered liminal leisure spaces, nurturing social orders that allow for hedonistic forms of conduct, the performances of selves within these contexts can negotiate dominant moral values; the commercial production and consumption of hospitality becomes entangled within social and political agendas.

Furthermore, the case of the *Freelands* illustrates how the production and consumption of hospitality was not only outside of a formal organisational frame; it often operated outside legal frameworks. The blatant disregard of the licensing laws, the undeclared workforce and prevalence of drugs all helped to create the hospitality experience.

I am not suggesting the entire hospitality industry is composed of an illicit workforce that facilitates and encourages deviant behaviours through casual relationships. Nevertheless, these grey areas where the different contexts of hospitality overlap within service encounters are an important part of the experience. Accounts of these alternative hospitality cultures only surface through biographical reflections (Bourdain 2000, Orwell 1989), while academic studies are rare (Crang 1994, Mars and Nicod 1984, Peacock and Kübler 2001). The challenge for hospitality research is to develop further intensive ethnographic studies from within the service contexts in order to understand

the very essence of hospitality's production and consumption. Simultaneously, such studies will have to be developed alongside critical and reflexive ethical debates considering the implications of these kinds of exposés. It may be useful to involve the very participants, both hosts and guests, by encouraging them to write their own accounts of the hospitality experience. This may overcome some of the ethical problems of consent while enhancing the trustworthiness of the ethnography through dialogic, 'multi-voiced' or 'polyvocal' reflection.

The ecological analogy demonstrated that it was useful to look beyond the immediate experience. Future studies, following these lines of inquiry, can make use of broader methodological frameworks. The study of the *Freelands* shows how the participation of hosts and guests in certain subcultures, their subsequent cultural knowledge, and their awareness of signals (as signs) that drew on their knowledge base, critically influenced their actions. Future research can make use of visual techniques, especially photographs but also live film footage to assess the cultural and cognitive aspects of perception. For example, consumers can use disposable cameras to document their experiences and capture those social or physical aspects of the hospitality ecologies that influenced their experience.

The informal experiments with friends and acquaintances (chapter 6) used an existential type of 'critical incident' technique by considering how biographies, experiences and knowledge were mobilised in situ. Future research can use more traditional critical incident methodologies, after the event, to examine how people engaged with the hospitality experience (Bitner et al 1990, Chell and Pittway 1998, Flanagan 1954, Guiry 1992). This will help to understand both the situational and the cultural aspects of consumer behaviour.

The ecological approach recognises that hospitality is a spatial phenomenon. In examining the spatial dimension, the study also demonstrated how encounters varied

inside the physical space: how certain zones or areas were more or less conducive to different kinds of hospitalities. It is axiomatic to assume that the physical features of space are directly used to construct ambiance by encouraging or directing certain behavioural norms. Physical characteristics of space create a 'dialogue' between consumer segments by appealing to their aesthetic and cultural values. This kind of social-ecological study can inform the design of hospitality spaces by understanding the shared values of consumers.

Again, the immediacy of space is entangled with external societal forces. The study demonstrated the usefulness of considering broader social and political geographies. In part, this geographical analysis considered the relationship space had with its immediate locality. The *Freelands* had specific social, political and moral implications in relation to the town in which it was located; it was a unique point within the heteronormative landscape. The hospitality space reflected an oppositional social order where alternative identities could be performed.

Simultaneously, the *Freelands* illustrated the relationship it shared with other similar spaces and social orders. This kind of socio-spatial approach can make it possible to construct geographies of hospitality, topographies no longer necessarily defined in terms of linear space. The points on these landscapes mark product or service constellations that reflect social positions and tastes. The venues people patronise may not be the ones closest to them in physical space, but those they identified with in abstract space. In this case, people went to gay venues in around London even though numerous 'straight' spaces were closer to them. More specifically, they went to certain sorts of gay venues, ones that reflected their tastes, values or even their aspirations. However, this is not unique to lesbian or gay consumers and the challenge for future research is to map the social and spatial patterns of other networks – those identifying

with different values or lifestyle genres. This kind of research has clear marketing applications.

Within my research, I used people's perceptions of places and their associated cultures to understand their social positions. However, I did this informally during casual encounters and semi-structured interviews. I considered using the names of places on cards that respondents could lay out and group together as a way to elicit the perceived characteristics of places; similar methods are frequently employed within market research interviews and focus groups. However, I did not feel it was appropriate to use these methods as they emphasised the role distinctions between researcher and researched. In order to address these issues, future research can make use of research teams, where different members can explore the same topic through differing strategies and methodologies; thus allowing for further data triangulation. More importantly, this could potentially help overcome the tensions of intrusive research as fieldworkers do not have to constantly and visibly shift between participant and researcher roles. The more visible and overt members of the team can pursue 'confrontational' tactics, while less visible members employ 'incremental' strategies.

However, as a concluding point, I feel that the most important questions of conducting research within hospitality ecologies are not the pragmatic ones concerning methodologies. The crucial questions to ask are moral ones, the most important of which is, who will this research benefit? Will my conclusions allow consumers to realise empowering networks of sociality through their production and consumption of hospitality spaces? Will it help consumers to realise their power within the production of hospitality, thus allowing them to practice alternative strategies of resistance in creating their moral spaces? Will it help hospitality operators appreciate the emotional labour of their staff, encouraging employers to improve working conditions and remuneration? Simultaneously, if the value of emotional labour is recognised and

acknowledged, will this help frontline staff to demand better working conditions? Conversely, by exposing the morally ambiguous or insidious aspects of the hospitality experience, am I simply providing the conceptual tools for marketers and managers to manipulate both the hosts and guests? Worse still, am I contributing the suppression of already disenfranchised people as their marginal economies or their empowering social spaces become increasingly regulated? Perhaps these critical questions need to be asked and answered above all others.

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Appendix a. Competitive Analysis

The Townhouse

During the autumn of 2002, rumours began to spread about a new gay bar opening in Compton. The *Townhouse* was located across the road from one of the two railway stations that served Compton. This was much closer to the centre of the town, and as a result, it had to operate more subtly.

On special occasions, they often called on existing networks of friends and acquaintances to fill the pub. However, they intended to target the local market for regular customers. When the managers first took over they placed rainbow stickers in the window and fliers were handed out by one of the bar staff around Compton. The bar had a great deal of novelty value and many people from the *Freelands* began to go there. People from the area even started to put up posters and notices advertising gay social events and services at the *Townhouse*. The managers were supported by a number of our regulars, but in general, the gay and lesbian presence was less visible than in the *Freelands*.

Two of our bar staff even went to work there; Liz worked there part-time, and Larry decided to work there permanently. The clientele was starting to change although the place-image was ambiguous. Some people, like Daniel, and his boyfriend Warren, felt comfortable enough to kiss in there, although this was mostly limited to greetings. However, Larry was told to refrain from acting 'too camp' behind the bar. For most gay customers that I talked to, it was not obviously gay enough, although for the pub's existing regulars its image was already tainted by the idea of it turning gay.

There were a few incidents where regulars assertively showed their disapproval. On one occasion, a regular noted that it seemed silly to put up stickers on the window

advertising a popular children's television programme from the 1980s. When someone pointed out that the rainbow flag represented something else, the man got vexed and started to remove the stickers in protest; he was escorted out by the staff. Similarly, the pub's sponsored football team started to affiliate itself with another pub. I was told they had not lost a single game since the pub 'turned gay' as taunting on the pitch from other teams resulted in gross overcompensation by players.

The bar was owned by a large holding company and the managers did not immediately announce that the bar would be 'gay'. News of the *Townhouse* spread mainly through informal gossip networks. Of course, everyone knew in our bar and the *Freelands* was an important point of dissemination. However, in order to open a more visibly gay bar in that part of the town relied on the support of the holding company. It would have meant further investment in promotion, and of course, security. The owners felt it was too much of a risk to operate an openly gay bar in the town and the two managers left.

In those three months, there was a lot of uncertainty about the survival of the *Freelands*. The novelty of a new gay venue attracted many people to go there. This coincided with our second straight female manager, and the run up to Christmas, which was always a quiet period. The *Townhouse* bar was bigger, in better condition, and potentially had access to more investment from the holding company. The bar staff were paid more and everyone worked there (more or less) legally.

However, not everyone saw this bar as threatening competition. Certainly, both the managers of the *Townhouse* and the *Freelands* assumed the two bars would complement each other. A few customers suggested that it was better for everyone as it would encourage more people to come to Compton as there was now a 'choice' of venues. Consequently, the second bar would also strengthen gay visibility in the town and both bars would benefit.

Most people assumed that the *Freelands* survived and prospered because it was out of

the way. Simultaneously, the majority of people I talked to felt the *Townhouse* was doomed to failure because it was too visible and too close to the centre of town. More importantly, because the holding company withheld its support, the establishment of another gay space in Compton failed. By the last week of the two gay manager's time there, the clientele was already changing to a 'rougher straight crowd'. The managers actively discouraged people from coming and they even cancelled their leaving party.

The broader competition

The following section shifts the nature of analysis slightly and adopts a more managerial and marketing perspective. This aims to complement the ethnographic aspect of the analysis in understanding the *Freelands* as both social and commercial venture. Admittedly, the following discussion focuses on other hospitality venues at the expense of other substitute activities such as the cinema, or even home-based activities. I have limited the competitive analysis in this way because it highlights important comparative factors between the different commercial hospitality ventures, and their particular social orders.

Direct competitors and the market environment

To begin, it is important to consider who the potential competitors were, and the nature of the market in which they were operating. The town and its immediate environs had approximately twenty-two bars and public houses, with four pubs located in the same 'village' district. If I include restaurants which had bar areas, this number would be nearer thirty. Additionally, there were a number of private member's bars (*British Legion, Freemason's Lodge, Rotary Club* etc.) and a pool hall in the town. Compton

had four venues with late licences: three 'nightclubs' with 2 a.m. licences and one bar with a midnight licence on weekends. All the managers at the *Freelands* had 'after-hours' drinks although this did not compare to a club or disco environment. Furthermore, whether late drinks took place or not, and how long they went on for, usually depended on the mood of the managers and on the enthusiasm of the customers. Naturally, there was a great deal of segmentation, although a large number of bars targeted a younger clientele. For most informants, the more heterosexual and violent spaces informed the popular, and usually negative, place-image of the town. Compton naturally had a *Weatherspoon's*, known for its cheap drinks, and a range of other loud bars that played energetic dance music at weekends. The town had a 'rockers/bikers' pub (the *Townhouse*, discussed above), and two bars that catered for a more 'alternative grunge/student type'.¹ There was considerable differentiation in terms of pricing and the fashion image. Three or four positioned themselves as 'high-class' venues with restrictive entry policies, dress codes and premium pricing strategies.² A number of venues consciously rejected these positions and targeted an older and more conservative clientele; they tended to position themselves as 'unpretentious' places that served 'real ale' and maintained the more traditional image of a public house. These kinds of pubs and bars had no security personnel on the doors; there were no dress codes and there was a greater level of heterogeneity in the ages of the consumers.

In terms of food, the town had a range of alternatives with most bars offering some kind of food and some operating distinct restaurant sections. Compton had the usual group of branded international fast food chains, alongside a range of more expensive, international and ethnic restaurants.

The *Freelands* did not have an official catering licence and did not serve food regularly. Some of the managers started providing food although there was no consistent company policy. The managers were allotted £20 per week to provide bar snacks and most

managers occasionally put cooked snacks out on certain weeknights (usually quiz-night); however, this money was usually spent on other things. The bar was away from the centre so even when managers took it upon themselves to cook, the lack of advertisement hindered its success and food service was usually abandoned within a few weeks. However, parties were usually catered and barbecues took place in the summer.

Regional competition

The nearest bars and nightclubs catering for a lesbian and gay clientele were between five and six miles away, closer to the centre of London. There were three nightclubs within six miles of the bar, and about eight bars, some operating late licences. Interestingly, in neighbouring towns where more than one gay venue was located, there tended to be increased product differentiation, with venues targeting specific groups.

The most notable and significant competitors were located about five miles away in a neighbouring town; the *Roadhouse* (bar/nightclub), *Whytes* (pseudo-trendy bar) and *Coast* (bar/nightclub) were all popular venues with the clients of the *Freelands*. These were considered the most obvious direct competitors for the local lesbian and gay market.

The *Roadhouse* was notable because it had a very distinct place-image as a 'dirty place' with 'dubious' clientele. It had an upstairs bar area with pool tables and a 'disco' in the basement. The mere mention of its name always evoked the term 'sticky carpet' by informants. Paradoxically, it was condemned and denigrated by most of the people I talked to, although a number of them still went there regularly. Both the *Roadhouse* and *Whytes* were located in a more impoverished and ethnically diverse borough inside London.

Coast was a bar and nightclub located in another borough of London. It was seen as a more respectable and upmarket venue. It had a large lesbian following and appeared to have considerably more investment than the *Roadhouse* or *Whytes*. *Coast* was made up of four different spaces including a bar, disco, conservatory bar and garden; it advertised regularly through flyers and in the gay press and organised a number of regular theme nights such as 'foam parties'.

All three of these venues were more expensive, charged entry fees at weekends and operated 'late-licences'. However, they also held regular promotional drinks events and 'happy-hours'. The level of investment meant the *Freelands* could not compete with these venues directly. We did not have an official late-licence and our after-hours drinks were not organised according to any set policy. Nor could the *Freelands* compete in terms of drinks/pricing promotions, decorations or style.

For many people, especially younger consumers, the *Freelands* served as a gathering point before moving on to these venues. What was interesting to note was that for most of my informants, going to the *Freelands* was not considered going out at all, whereas going out to these places was more of an event.

The city

The city and Soho in particular was approximately twelve miles away from Compton. Moreover, whereas the other bars in the region were reached by car and taxi, people used public transport to get into the centre of London. Going to London was always considered a 'happening' and an event. London offered a more sophisticated level of market segmentation and product differentiation. London venues such as the *Village*, *Shadow Lounge*, *Friendly Society*, *Manto's*, *Old Compton's*, *G.A.Y.* and *Heaven* had a much stronger market presence. They already had a well-established place-image and

sustained this through considerable marketing and advertising investment. For the lesbian and gay consumers, there was more choice (in every sense of the word), alongside the increased level of safety in large, cosmopolitan and visibly gay areas such as Soho.

However, going to London also meant paying premium prices for entry and drinks, and additional effort to get there and get back. More importantly, in terms of identification, prominently gay venues in London were associated with the 'scene' and overt gay lifestyles. Some people distanced themselves from the scene because they felt it was 'forced', ' clichéd' and 'insincere'. Sexual dissidents still 'in the closet', or marginal participants in the scene, often did not feel comfortable in these kinds of intensely gay environments. This was usually the case for people experimenting with their sexuality and for those thinking of 'coming out' or people new to the scene. The *Freelands* was a halfway place, which reflected elements of a gay lifestyle, although it was not the intimidating environment that gay venues in London could be.

Notes

¹ These terms were used by patrons from the bar and others in the town to describe these venues.

² I say three or four as entry policies changed throughout the week, being more lax on weekdays, and more demanding at weekends.

Appendix b. Interview Format and Questions

The following section sets out the questions asked of all the informants within the initial interviews. Subsequent interviews were used to elaborate on specific themes and focus on emerging topics. My original question format was informed by Spradley's (1979) 'ethnographic interview'. Spradley's interview structure was built on three primary question types: 'descriptive', 'structural' and 'contrast'. *Descriptive* questions, sought to gain a rich, detailed insight into the way people organised meanings in their own cultural surroundings. The aim was to question those cultural practices and artefacts deemed important by the respondent (as a participant in a particular cultural sphere). Equally important were the linguistic and representational practices the informant employed. These often proved to be key definers of a cultural group. Descriptive questions allowed me to become familiar with the native language and culturally specific linguistic signifiers, which meant following interaction made use of 'folk terms'.

The aim was to interrogate these descriptive responses in order to identify specific signifiers from which to decipher the relevant signified concept. Spradley argued against asking for meaning, but asking instead for *use* (1979: 97). He argued that when ethnographers asked for meaning, the response was usually brief and of little value. For Spradley, the emphasis shifted to placing these concepts into context and asking for these key terms to be used in specific utterances. Following the linguistic tradition, it was assumed that all utterances took their meaning in a system of expression.

Spradley's methodology sought to capture the different categories individuals used to identify and catalogue specific cultural practices and artefacts. The aim was to identify 'domains' (specific concepts) and their relative 'cover terms' (the names for these specific domains). For example, the term 'gay bar' was a 'cover term' for a specific

kind of drinking establishment. Some places could be categorised as this kind of venue and therefore belonged to this domain. Additionally, the task was to discover what other 'included terms' can be included under this cover term. For example, what other places could be included under this domain, based on a set of physical or maybe even social characteristics.

The aim was to identify the 'semantic relationships' between cover terms and their relative included terms. Semantic relationship referred to the relationship between terms in any linguistic communication. Following Spradley (1979), it was possible to examine a number of universal semantic relationships. For example:

- | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| 1. Strict inclusion | X is a kind of Y |
| 2. Spatial | X is a place in Y, X is a part of Y |
| 3. Cause-effect | X is the result of Y, X is a cause of Y |
| 4. Rationale | X is a reason for doing Y |
| 5. Location for action | X is a place for doing Y |
| 6. Function | X is used for Y |
| 7. Means-end | X is a way to do Y |
| 8. Sequence | X is a step (stage) in Y |
| 9. Attribution | X is an attribute (characteristic) of Y |

Spradley (1979:111)

The aim was to identify the semantic relationships that belonged to certain consumers and consumer types. For example, how people categorised other places, consumers or those inside or outside of the 'group'. More importantly, I sought to understand the basis on which these categories were established. Specific narrative accounts were examined to identify the semantic relationships between terms in order to question how

people constructed their environment. By using comparisons, the research examined similarities and differences in order to understand consumer behaviour at the *cognitive* and the *social/cultural* level.

Once certain conceptual domains and cover terms were gained through descriptive questions, their meanings were examined by questioning their nature, and their relationships with other domain terms. For example, once a certain type of consumer had been identified, what other consumer types may be said to exist? Again, the function of such line of inquiry was to understand the way people, places and concepts were classified, and how categories were formed. These *structural* questions offered ways to explore how individuals interpreted and reacted to symbolic signifiers such as cultural artefacts, clothing or non-verbal communications. Again, in comparing responses and identifying similarities and differences, certain patterns were identified.

The last of Spradley's question types, *contrast* questions, drew on the negative relationships concepts shared; definitions arose by considering what they excluded. Any categorisation that worked on principles of inclusion simultaneously excluded a whole series of other concepts. Therefore, any response offered by the informant was simultaneously understood in terms of what was not included.

Spradley's approach was a useful conceptual starting point, although it often failed to reflect the spontaneity of fieldwork. The interview was made to seem like an ordered and structured process, which ignored the dynamism of field relationships.

The following questions reflect similar attempts to project a sense of stability on the interview process. The usefulness of semi-structured interviews was the possibility for deviation. Unexpected accounts, confessions and narratives opened up new lines of inquiry. These were often serendipitous and their significance frequently did not become evident until much later.

By the time it came to conducting interviews, I had already explained my work to potential informants. Nevertheless, at the start of each interview, I offered a further explanation of my research objectives and asked for their permission to record the interview; however, I made it clear that we could stop recording at any time. I also emphasised that informants were free to withdraw their participation at any stage and assured participants that their names and responses would be kept confidential. All the interviews started with the informants introducing themselves, which paved the way for a set of informal questions intended to relax the informants.

Could you introduce yourself? Maybe tell me your age and what you do for a living?

Although I had a profile of most of my informants, this helped clarify personal details.

Do you live in Compton/Do you live locally? Have you lived there for long? If not, where were you before, and how long did you live there?

Often when people had moved to Compton from somewhere else, this was a good way to draw out comparisons about the mentality of the different places, especially attitudes toward sexuality. This also gave a reasonable insight into personal histories.

What do you think of Compton/How would you describe the town/its culture/the people in Compton?

These broad descriptive questions were especially useful in instigating lengthy personal accounts.

When did you first come here [the *Freelands*]? How did you find out about this place? Whom did you come with when you first came here?

There were several examples of people who knew about the *Freelands* for years before coming to the bar. It was useful to see how they found out about the place, who instigated the visits, and whether they came here with the same people or not afterwards.

What was it like when you first came here/what did you think of it?

The descriptive responses allowed me to identify what features interviewees noticed about the space or the people; consequently, it offered useful insights into how people categorised places and other people.

Has it changed a lot since then? If yes, how?

This line of questioning helped develop a diachronic analysis that considered change. It also offered an insight into the perceptions of informants and their responses often reflected the proximity relationships they shared with others.

How often do you come here?

People's attendance generally reflected their sense of affiliation and often defined both the breadth and the potential limits of their knowledge. Their responses illustrated their perceptions of their status within the social space, which in turn, helped to appreciate how status was defined in general.

Where else do you go? Is there anywhere you go to regularly?

Often I had to feign ignorance during these questions, giving them the opportunity to offer descriptive accounts of other venues. Again, this was linked to the way places

were categorised. Furthermore, this helped me to map constellations of places and venues, which reflected tastes and access to various types of capital. These questions were usually followed by further descriptive questions about specific venues.

Is there anywhere you don't/wouldn't go to? What kinds of places don't/wouldn't you go to? Why not?

Drawing on Spradley's typology, these contrast questions helped to map points of exclusion and differentiation.

How do those places compare to this bar?

In the answers to the previous questions, explanations and narratives often drew on sameness and difference, employing comparisons. It was interesting to note which places and experiences people grouped together in order to describe something. This made it possible to question how the meanings of a place (or experience) took shape in relation to other same, similar or different experiences. Following the 'grounded theory' approach (Glaser and Strauss 1967), these questions were important in identifying categories/'domains' and the 'semantic links' between such domains. This helped to construct cartographies of taste, and identify the position/status of specific hospitality venues.

What kinds of people do you think go to those kinds of places?

This kind of 'projective technique' helped to understand how people categorised the 'other', and what features signified sameness and difference (Gordon and Langmaid 1988, Oppenheim 1992, Will *et al* 1996, Zikmund 1991).

Can you describe this place? How would/do you describe this place to other people?

I often used this question to return to, and expand on, answers to the previous questions about the perceptions of places. This was also a good way to consider what they thought about the physical character of the venue, including the furnishings and decorations.

Have you brought people to *Freelands* before? Do you bring others to the *Freelands*? What kinds of people have you brought/would you bring? Is there anyone, or any kinds of people, you would not bring here?

This not only helped to understand their social networks, but also their perceptions of the *Freelands*, and the perceptions and tastes of their friends and acquaintances.

What kinds of people come here? How would you describe the people that come here?

As Bourdieu said: “nothing classifies somebody more than the way he or she classifies” (1990: 132). If they were not able to offer descriptive accounts of the culture they belonged to, this approach revealed where they positioned themselves in relation to other cultures. I usually followed up these sorts of questions by asking why specific people or certain kinds of people came, or did not come to the *Freelands*. Again, this helped to define people’s perceptions, and responses usually offered insights into other people’s biographies.

What kinds of people don’t/wouldn’t come here?

This is question often yielded unhelpful responses as people were not used to such reverse logic. Again, the aim was to try to ascertain how respondents classified people, and whom he/she thought ‘belonged’ in a specific social space. These questions worked

in conjunction with the previous questions in trying to understand the way informants created social maps and the way people were catalogued.

Do you think there is a sense of community here?

This was another effective way to assert people's perception of the social characteristics of the consuming environment, and their position in relation other individuals and units. If they answered 'yes', I usually asked them to explain why they thought this was so. If they answered 'no' I usually followed this by asking why not and asked how they thought people were divided. This usually led us to explore categories of people in terms of class, lifestyles, age and sexuality. Based on their responses, I also asked if they thought was a 'cliquey' place and always asked what sort of people grouped together. I always asked what kinds of people they 'hung around with'/'talked to', and if there were people/sorts of people they did not talk to or mix with; naturally, I inquired why.

Do you get more men or women in here?

I felt this was a male-oriented space but I asked this to get their perceptions and avoid tainting their responses. The answer was usually that more men came to the *Freelands*. I then asked why so few women came here, what would change this, and where else women went. I also asked most people whether women had the same opportunities as the men to do what they wanted in the *Freelands*. I pursued this line of questioning more rigorously when interviewing women.

The people that come here, where else do you think they go?

The response drew on the respondents' awareness and perceptions of other people and their tastes. The question also made use of 'projective techniques' in the construction of meaning, where informants gave their opinions of other people.

What do you think of the management?

This was useful in considering how the perceived ideals of the management, and their version of the bar, compared with the perceptions of consumers. Within some interviews, I also asked people how they would run the bar. This gave valuable insight into people's expectations, perceptions and potential 'needs' concerning the management of the hospitality experience.

What kind of music do they play here?

This was useful in understanding their awareness of differences in musical genres. Their knowledge of musical genres and acts was a good indicator of their general relationship with certain life-style discourses.

Appendix c. Informant Profiles

Within the following section, I offer a brief description of the principal characters of the present study. For reasons of confidentiality, all the names of the informants, as well as some of their personal details, have been changed. With the exception of a few, all of the following people participated in the formal interviews. A number of other people also participated in the interviews although I have not referred to them extensively in the thesis, and consequently, I have not discussed them here.

Adam

Adam was a hairdresser and in his early twenties. He lived near Compton and regularly associated with people from the local gay and lesbian youth group. The majority of Adam's friends were of similar age and included boys and girls. He was very fashion conscious and always sported wonderfully exotic hairstyles.

When Adam was in the *Freelands*, he was always visible (and audible); he was known to many of the regulars in the bar, but he remained an infrequent consumer. The majority of the time, Adam showed a great deal of dissent toward the *Freelands* and regularly went to gay bars further away, despite the *Freelands* being his closest venue.

Andy

I only referred to Andy twice within the thesis, although his contributions informed the discussions on proximity relationships, subcultural capital and the performance of sexual identity. Andy was a large 'straight-acting' man who worked as a fitness instructor. He did not dress particularly 'gay', or follow the fashion trends that many

other younger people did. In the beginning, he was a regular customer although he was not well connected; he was not a particularly big drinker and did not engage in extended reciprocal relationships or networks.

Andy was sexually active, although he had limited knowledge of the 'gay scene' as a whole. He knew about specific places even though he had not necessarily been to them. Furthermore, he was aware of the queer performativity and the complex genres of sexual dissidence. However, because he was a marginal participant, he often lacked the social and subcultural capital to engage with many gay men. This was especially true for the more feminine 'queens', who were a lot more aware and involved with the popular discourses of gay identity.

Colin

Colin was a good looking, shaven headed young man in his early twenties who often gave the impression of being a stereotypical 'straight boy' from Compton. He regularly smoked 'skunk' (a particularly potent type of marijuana), drank lager and was partial to a can of 'Tennent's Extra' in the mornings. Colin was very 'straight-acting' and it was difficult to know he was gay from his behaviour or mannerisms. He tended to wear jeans, trainers and a baseball cap and spoke in a very rough 'cockney' accent. Despite this impression, Colin was very open about his sexuality; his parents accepted his lifestyle and he even told people at his workplace.

Colin originally worked as a delivery driver, but then went back to college to study floristry. However, Colin was a very receptive young man; he often came in on his own and talked to a range of people. Consequently, he knew many of the regulars and principals, and most people liked him. Because of his personality and his connectedness

to other networks, he could stay away from the *Freelands* but still enter into other social units when he did come in.

Colin knew about the scene but did not frequent 'sceney' bars and nightclubs. He was well aware of the popular discourses of gay lifestyles and identities, although he did not use the argot or engage in the queer performances that many of his contemporaries did. Nevertheless, Colin had a long-term relationship with Scott, who was a prominent young 'queen', until Scott walked out on him, taking a large sum of money from his bank account.

Damien

Damien became a prominent character in the *Freelands* although he remained relatively disconnected from many of the other regular clientele. He lived in a neighbouring town and often went to straight pubs there, but the *Freelands* was the only gay place he patronised. He had previously worked as a photographer and lectured for a number of years in the history of art. Damien was a large man in his late 40s and had a characteristic laugh that echoed around the room. He did not attempt to adopt gay fashions and dressed very casually; the only real indicator of his sexuality and status were his flamboyant theatrical gestures and his elaborate use of the English language. He was passionate about art, philosophy, literature and politics, often engaging in esoteric conversation with his younger friend Robert who had a similar intellectual mind.

It is obvious to conclude that Damien stuck out like sore thumb inside the *Freelands*; his intellectual background, perceived class position and his lack of aesthetic capital distanced him from many of our other customers. He regularly came in on his own and always sat at the bar; he always had things to say, but people were often not prepared to

listen. He was a regular, coming in many times during the week, until his mother became ill and he stopped coming to the bar for a long time. This coincided with his closest acquaintance Robert moving away from the area. After a long absence, Damien started coming to the *Freelands* again; his performative routine remained the same, which continued to define the proximity relations he had with most people. However, he came into the bar every day and got on well with Kate and was subsequently included in many of the after-hours drinks. In that sense, he became more of an 'insider' and many of the regulars were friendly towards him; nevertheless, his 'social range' was restricted.

Daniel

Daniel was in his early 30s and worked as an analyst in the civil service. He moved to Compton with his boyfriend Warren in the mid 90s and they lived near the *Freelands*. Before the *Freelands* opened, they regularly drank in another bar in the Compton's village district (the *Crescent*), which was just around the corner from their house. They said the *Crescent* was: 'Compton's first gay bar', because the manager was very accepting of them, which then legitimised their presence among the customers. Consequently, the *Crescent* was their original 'local', and they used to bring their friends there regularly.

Daniel found out about the *Freelands* when it first opened, and was one of the first customers to drink in there. He knew most of the managers and remained a principal customer for many years, often helping to serve drinks on weekends. He had a long-standing history within the *Freelands* and was well-integrated and well-connected. As I mentioned before, Daniel also sang in a male choir and regularly went out in London. Daniel regularly frequented fashionable (modern and expensive) places in Soho,

although he enjoyed traditional 'real-ale' pubs. He was intelligent and had access to relatively high levels of social and subcultural capital.

By the end of Steve's time at the bar, Daniel, Warren and his friends were not coming as often as they had in the past. Following a number of incidents with Steve, they were no longer on friendly terms and Daniel stopped offering to help run the bar. Steve felt they were not coming in often enough and would not keep the bar open for them after closing time; their proximity relationship had direct repercussions on his potential to participate. Nevertheless, he still organised his birthday parties there, brought in others, met his friends at the *Freelands*, and he continued to post photos of events on his website.

Daniel's principal status diminished further when Steve left; he met Jill (the new manageress) but rarely came in. Nevertheless, because of his past history and association with a number of individuals, and their networks, Daniel could come in and engage with many people.

Daniel was one of the key people who spread word about the *Townhouse* when it opened as a gay/gay friendly bar. He shared close proximity relations with both the managers and regularly stayed there for drinks after 'time'. This was during the same time that Kate came to run the bar. Following Larry's defection to the *Townhouse*, Kate and Larry had an argument about Larry 'badmouthing' the *Freelands* and Kate barred him. On one night, Larry went out with Daniel and a group of his friends and Daniel asked Kate whether they could come to the bar and bring Larry with them. When Kate refused, this led to an argument. This distanced Daniel even further from Kate, and his principal status was all but lost within the *Freelands*.

Darren

Darren was in his late teens and originally came from a town on the Southeast coast of England. He had lived in a number of areas in London before moving to Compton. Darren had worked in numerous different occupations, even appearing in a number of pornographic films, before taking a position in a large telecommunications company. He lived a short distance from the *Freelands* and regularly came in on his own, usually sitting at the bar talking to the bar-staff or other regulars.

Darren was part of an 'alternative' gay scene and dressed accordingly; he often wore a long black leather jacket and nail varnish. Darren said, when he was younger (strange, as he was only 19), he regularly went to *G.A.Y.*, *Heaven*, the *Ku-bar* and other prominent venues on the gay scene. However, he grew increasingly disillusioned with 'the scene' and started to go regularly to 'alternative' gay venues. Whereas *G.A.Y.* is known as a contemporary dance music venue, Darren preferred bars and clubs that played alternative rock or 'grunge' music such as *Popstarz*.

Because of his experience of the scene, and his dissent towards the scene, Darren was helpful in identifying and defining performative types and categories. When I asked Darren about what kinds of people went to the *Freelands*, and elsewhere, he was able to offer some highly defined examples. With most other people, their categories were hazier and they found it difficult to offer clear examples and definitions.

Dave

I have already talked about Dave extensively and he needs little introduction. As I mentioned before, Dave ran a building maintenance business, but then went to work as a bus driver when his business failed. Running his own business gave him a lot of free

time and he often sat in the bar for most of the day. In general, Dave tended to drink in the daytime, which allowed him to get to know the managers, and much of the gossip in the bar; he knew the managers, the staff, as well as the owners of the bar.

Physically, Dave was a large man and regularly went to gay saunas and 'chunkies' nights (special events for the 'larger gay man'). He was sexually active although he was usually coy about most of his sexual adventures. Dave was very 'straight-acting' and tended to dress casually, wearing jeans and trainers. Although, he himself questioned his class, Dave tended to mix with a rougher crowd and knew a lot about the seedier side of the world. He always had some anecdote or gossip to share and had access to a range of prescription and illegal drugs. His receptiveness, alongside his insight into the *Freelands'* organisation made him a useful informant.

Dillon

Dillon was another (in)famous character who I talked about extensively throughout this thesis. Everyone, including himself, acknowledged he was self-centred and vain, although he was also very friendly and tended to socialise extensively. Dillon was in his early 20s and worked in a number of clothes shops in Compton before taking a job in an expensive shoe shop. As expected, he invested heavily in clothing and followed fashion trends. It is reasonable to conclude that Dillon dressed more stereotypically like a young gay man, wearing tight-fitting designer clothing. He originally lived outside of Compton in a slightly poorer area, although he moved around, living in a number of places which he rented with friends.

Dillon was the archetypal hedonist consumer. His alcohol and cocaine binges, as well as his exhibitionism, were legendary. Most people knew of Dillon and he often managed to talk his way around the bar, engaging with everyone present at the time. This

engagement usually took the form of lengthy conversations, dancing or just apologising for his behaviour. He was well connected and had the potential to integrate himself in other social networks. However, people often showed considerable dissent toward his antics. The majority of his acquaintances were girls: his best friend was a straight French girl; and he was particularly good friends with group of lesbian girls. They went out together to many of the venues near the *Freelands* (*Whytes, Roadhouse* and *Coast*) although, when they were in London, the girls usually insisted on going to lesbian bars. Dillon's class background was ambiguous at first and it was certainly misleading to look at his frivolous spending and designer clothes. He left school early and worked in retail for most of his life. However, he certainly aspired to greater things. Dillon wanted to work in fashion or retail purchasing, but he would have been equally happy as a 'Big Brother celebrity'.

Fifi

Fifi got his nickname when two of his friends wrote 'Fifi Trixabelle Farquat' underneath the doorbell at his old flat. He was shy about his age and it took me a long time to find out he was in his early 40s. Fifi had little formal education and started his career in hospitality as a dishwasher before moving into the licensed trade. He even ran a gay sauna at one point and frequently told us stories and anecdotes about his past misadventures. Although I am sure he would be very offended reading this, to me, he epitomised the archetypal 'old queen' with his camp nasal voice and effeminate gestures.

Fifi was used to playing the role of the 'landlady', often discussing customers' personal and emotional issues while working behind the bar. As with Steve, Fifi represented a different generation of gay man, which was reflected in his management style. He did

not go out on the current gay scene although he was familiar with most of its prominent characteristics. Both Steve and Fifi were well aware of the needs of 'straight' men, while they also appreciated the heterogeneity of the consumers. Fifi in particular made a point of trying to avoid having a consumer profile that was too young or old, male or female, or even gay or straight. They both recognised the need for a 'safe place', although they appreciated that relying on gay consumers alone was unwise. Nevertheless, in his performance of the 'landlady's' role, Fifi undoubtedly helped to construct a dissident sexual space

Frank (and George)

Frank was the sort of customer Fifi and Steve wanted to make comfortable. He was a single parent in his late 20s who had to deal with the challenges of raising a teenage child while coming to terms with his sexuality. This was made particularly difficult because of his violent and strongly homophobic relatives. Many people said he was an alcoholic and I rarely saw him sober. However, I mostly saw him in the *Freelands* and did not socialise with him away from the bar.

Frank's closest friend was another regular at the bar, George, who I have not talked about in this thesis. George and Frank were involved in a relationship for a long time and tried to maintain their friendship after a difficult separation. Neither Frank nor George worked and they used to drink in the *Freelands* during the daytime. They were on good terms with Steve and Fifi, whom they talked to regularly. Their consistent presence meant they were known to many other regulars although they were not really integrated in many other social networks. They were both 'characters' in the bar but were never part of any of the regular social units.

Frank was barred after his relatives and some of their friends started a fight in the *Freelands*, which led to two people being assaulted. When Frank left, George stopped coming in too. George eventually moved away from the area and Frank was allowed back into the *Freelands* after about a year. Many of the regulars knew Frank although he remained an isolate. He was a very 'straight-acting' and deeply troubled gay man who was very much distanced from gay culture as a whole. Just like Mike, Frank did not frequent other gay places and felt more at home in straight bars and pubs. He had fleeting relationships with other similar people, although none of these had longevity. Frank even had a brief affair with Mike, and Dave, though nothing came of it.

James

James was an I.T. specialist in his mid 20s who was loosely affiliated with John, Patrick, Kerri and Leon and was particularly close friends with Liz. James was a very 'straight-acting' bisexual man and his sexuality was not immediately apparent. What he lacked in aesthetic capital, he more than made up for in educational capital and intelligence. He was known for his sharp observations, but his intelligence did not particularly help him to make friends. After all, the general class profile of the *Freelands* meant educational capital was not particularly convertible.

James did have access to considerable amounts of economic capital, and along with Patrick, regularly consumed excessively in the *Freelands*. He frequented many different gay places in and around London although he remained a principal consumer at the *Freelands*. He often acted as the 'door-person' at nights and during parties and regularly helped clean the bar, even while he was drinking.

Like Patrick, John, Kerri, Liz or Leon, James also worked behind the bar occasionally and his social and financial visibility meant he was similarly able to treat the bar as

home territory. Furthermore, he was familiar with the codes and performative characteristics of gay identification but generally eschewed camp behaviour. This was reflected in his choice of partners, although his friends were much more varied. He did, after all, participate in a variety of heterogeneous units which included straight women and lesbians, and people of different ages.

Jeff

Jeff was certainly a regular face in the *Freelands*, although he remained an isolate for most of the time. He was an unemployed accountant in his mid 40s who lacked the necessary social, economic and aesthetic capital to engage with most people. Jeff had a tendency to make improper advances toward individuals, especially youngsters, which were usually not well received. Additionally, he was never really involved with people on a friendly level, or engaged in reciprocal relationships.

He lived alone near the *Freelands* and usually came in for one beer at the end of the evening to see if he could find companionship. Like many people his age, Jeff did not go out on the gay scene and the *Freelands* was his main outlet for companionship.

Jenni

Jenni was another young lesbian, although her commitment to her sexuality was questionable and she still engaged in relationships with men. Her identification as lesbian, straight, or bisexual changed situationally according to her social context. This reflects the constructedness of sexuality as a marker of identity and its malleable nature in shifting social configurations.

Jenni was good friends with Michael and the two of them regularly made outings to places like *Coast*, which targeted the young market, and had a history of lesbian patronage. Jenni usually came to *Freelands* with Michael and rarely came on her own; she had a number of brief affairs in the *Freelands*, although none developed into serious relationships.

Having left school, Jenni started working at a fast food restaurant until she made the decision to join the police force. Consequently, she stopped coming to the bar while she was completing her training. By the time Jenni finished her training, Michael had moved abroad and the clientele had changed significantly; Jenni did not feel the same sense of association with the new clientele and rarely came in.

Jill

Jill was the replacement sent to take over the running of the *Freelands* after Steve and Marcus were dismissed. She seemed like a strange choice at first, being a straight woman in her 50s. However, her son Al was gay and Jill's attitude toward the pub's organisation was certainly a change from Steve's approach. Jill was a shrewd woman who used to run training courses for other pubs; she was regularly sent in as a 'troubleshooter' whose job was to salvage underperforming operations. Prior to coming to the *Freelands*, Jill had been running bars in predominantly Afro-Caribbean areas, which was reflected in some of her managerial decisions.

When she arrived, Jill set about creating a coherent marketing campaign for the *Freelands*. She set up a proper website and even arranged for alerts to be sent to customers about special events via 'sms' messages. She also started to run a West Indian kitchen serving jerk chicken and curry throughout the day. Her other significant change was the organisation of events and the consistent late opening of the bar. She

even 're-launched' the bar, which was celebrated by a large party where Jamaican white rum punch was served alongside Caribbean food.

Joe

Joe was in his late 20s and Ritchie's partner. Joe was the louder and more abrasive member of the duo and had a tendency to become violent; he was arrested on numerous occasions for affray and assault and Dave even testified as a character witness after one fight. He worked as a lorry driver, although both he and Ritchie were involved in a range of dubious dealings.

Joe and Ritchie usually drank in the *Freelands* during the day although they occasionally went on lengthy drug and drink binges in the evenings, when they made their presence felt. Many people, especially the older ones were very intimidated by both Joe and Ritchie. For a long time I felt the same because they constantly badgered me about my sexuality and about working in a gay bar. Despite this, Joe also contributed to the interviews and was a useful source of stories and information about gay bars in the surrounding areas.

John

John was a slim, well-presented man in his mid 20s who worked in sales. He was well aware of the contemporary gay scene and dressed accordingly. He was particularly good friends with Patrick and spent similar amounts of time and money in the *Freelands*. They often came to the bar together and stayed for lengthy drink and drug binges before going on to nightclubs and continuing their hedonistic consumption there.

John also used to work at the *Freelands* under a previous manager but left because of his work commitments. He came back to work in the *Freelands* on weekends but left again when he moved away from the area after receiving another job offer. Like Daniel, John was another person who worked at the *Freelands* primarily for his own amusement as opposed to any financial necessity. Working behind the bar allowed him to combine his leisure activities with work and he often used his job to pursue romantic interests. Like Marcus and Steve, John enjoyed the attention he received behind the bar and enthusiastically played the role of flamboyant camp barman.

Joyce

Joyce was another supposedly committed lesbian who experimented with heterosexual relationships. She was a large woman in her early 30s and worked as an administrator for the police. Despite her occupation, she did not seem to be bothered about the drug culture in the *Freelands*.

Joyce was another veteran of the bar and had been going there for many years; she worked at the bar under some of the previous managers and came back to work at the *Freelands* during Steve's time as manager. Unfortunately, she was fired on both occasions because she drank excessively behind the bar. This would not have been a problem as everybody drank behind the bar, but Joyce was also not paying for her vodka.

Joyce was another familiar character in the *Freelands* and she knew many of the regular people. More importantly, Joyce knew the bar staff, which meant she often came on her own and sat at the bar. This was rare among the women and it reflected her sense of comfort in the *Freelands*. She said she would not even think about going to other bars on her own.

Following a brief affair with the husband of her friend, she went through a difficult time and stayed away from the *Freelands*. People like Marcus and Steve were particularly unsympathetic about her problems and told many others about her indiscretion. She considered Marcus and Steve to be friends and their reaction no doubt added to the emotional strain. She disappeared altogether for over 6 months and came in very infrequently after that.

Kate

Kate was a petit straight woman in her 30s, who moved in with her 16-year-old daughter after Jill left. She was very secretive about where she worked previously and many people suspected that she had never run a bar on her own before [I later found out she had previously managed a pub in South-London]. In the beginning, she did not know how to clean the lines that brought up the beer from cellar and we constantly ran out of drinks because of inconsistent ordering. Understandably, many people were sceptical about Kate's appropriateness for the position.

Despite this, Kate was enthusiastic about the bar and regularly organised theme nights and parties, which were mostly successful. She also made a point of being highly visible in the bar and spent much of her free time drinking with the customers. She constantly bought drinks for the customers and used these personal acts of hospitality to retain the regulars. She also showed a great of patience and goodwill toward the staff and even organised a Christmas party for us in January. In many ways, I think she relied on personal obligations toward her to maintain the business as a whole.

Ken

I only talked about Ken very briefly in the thesis although he represented an interesting marginal participant. Ken had little aesthetic capital although he was a kind hearted and friendly man in his early 30s. He usually wore the same sporting jacket, baseball cap and wore large rimmed strong focal glasses. Ken came in regularly, usually sitting at the bar drinking soft drinks. Many people knew him although people rarely talked to him for extended periods and he was essentially an isolate for most of the time. He said he enjoyed a 'healthy' sex life although I never knew about his partners. I occasionally saw him come in with older men and I saw him leave with Jeff on a few occasions.

Ken was a registered schizophrenic and once told me of the voices in his head that were telling him he would: 'lead an army against the forces of evil.' Ken was a regular churchgoer and believed strongly in the righteous power of God and Jesus; he claimed to be an undiagnosed stigmatic and felt he could heal the sick if he really put his mind to it.

Ken was unemployed and lived off the inheritance he received after his mother's death. He said he tried to look for work, but alongside his other afflictions, his dyslexia prevented him from finding a full time job. Ken spent most of his time at a local day centre where he tried to: 'help others.' He had relatively little access to social, cultural aesthetic and economic capital and his psychological condition excluded Ken from most groups and networks.

Kerri

Kerri was another principal customer in the *Freelands*, alongside Patrick, Kerri, James and Leon. Besides Joyce, Kerri was the other prominent lesbian customer who regularly

came to the bar alone. She was also in her early 30s and moved down to London from the North of England to work in the I.T. industry. Like Joyce, Kerri was another voluptuous woman who dressed in very casual masculine clothes. She was not familiar with the popularised genres of lesbian or gay culture and paid little attention to the types of music being played. This reflected her distance from the gay and lesbian scene, although she regularly went to local bars such as the *Roadhouse*. Just like Patrick and James, Kerri could 'party hard' and could afford to participate in the lengthy drinking sessions.

Kerri did not have the cultural or aesthetic capital to engage with a broader lesbian scene and showed no particular desire to do so. However, within the *Freelands* she knew many of the principal consumers and always made a point of being on good terms with the managers or manageresses. Kerri spent a lot of time and money at the bar, which assured that she was always included in after-hour drinks. Her participation even extended to occasionally working at the bar alongside Leon and Patrick.

Larry

Larry was in his late teens when he came into the *Freelands* through James. Throughout their brief relationship, Larry was introduced to many of the other regulars and he eventually came to work at the *Freelands*. Up until then Larry had been unemployed and working in the *Freelands* proved to be a great novelty for him. By the time he split up with James, Larry knew many people in *Freelands* and was soon treating the bar as home territory. Jill offered him a full-time position and started to train him in bar management.

The novelty of working in the *Freelands* soon wore off and he stopped taking work seriously; he started missing workdays and upset a number of people with his gossiping

and promiscuous behaviour. In the end, Jill fired him, although Larry continued to drink at the bar. After Jill left, Kate hired Larry again but he soon left to work in the *Townhouse* when it opened up as a gay bar. When the *Townhouse* shut after a few weeks, he had the option to stay and work there although he decided to leave. Following an argument with Kate about Larry badmouthing the *Freelands*, Kate barred him and he stayed away from the bar after that.

Leon

Leon was a tall, well-groomed, public school educated man in his early 30s. Similarly to Patrick, Leon was a 'high maintenance' gay man who sought to augment his aesthetic capital by investing in his physical appearance. He was nicknamed 'trolley-dolly' because he previously worked as an airline steward before moving into clothing retail. Leon set up a clothing business, but this folded soon after and Leon moved abroad to start again.

Alongside Patrick and Kerri, Leon was another principal customer, especially during Kate's time as manager when Leon worked behind the bar on occasions. He knew most of the other principal customers although he was selective about who he socialised with. In general, Leon eschewed popular gay culture even though his speech and mannerisms were typically effeminate. Leon was a flirtatious person although he was not a strong disseminator of information. Nevertheless, he encouraged many of his straight women friends like Samantha to come to the *Freelands* regularly.

Lewis

Lewis was somewhat of a contradiction. His accent indicated a public school education, while his clothing and his behaviour firmly contradicted this perception. He wore the same torn leather jacket, smoked copious amounts of cannabis and used a bulky old mobile phone. Lewis was in his early 30s and worked in a bar while studying for a degree in literature; he said he wanted to become a teacher in the coming years. When he was sober, Lewis was a very intelligent man with emotional depth. However, he used to drink uncontrollably, which changed his personality for the worse. He was not affiliated with any particular unit or network, but regularly walked around talking to people, even when they did not want to listen. In that sense, most people knew him, and his reputation preceded him.

Lewis drank in a range of places, including Soho, although the *Freelands* was his regular in Compton. That was until Steve barred him because he was constantly pestering the customers and being argumentative. More specifically, Steve barred him after they argued over Lewis' drunken antics and Lewis swung at him with a tennis racket. We did not see him for over year until Steve went on holiday for a week. Lewis heard Steve had left and came in, but Steve had not left the premises yet, and after another argument, Lewis was forced to leave. I rarely saw Lewis after this incident, but did hear from others that he still drank in the area and had not changed his habits.

Liz

Liz was mainly friends with James although she became close friends with Leon, Kerri and Patrick as a result. She worked at the *Freelands* for a while and even went to work

in the *Townhouse* for the short time it was open. However, she left both these jobs to begin training for a career in the health service.

Liz was a voluptuous and busty girl in her early twenties and her friends were fascinated with her breasts. Just as with Samantha, she did not object to her friends touching her breasts, as long as it was part of a friendly routine. However, when jokes or comments became crude and focused on her breasts, they immediately became untouchable.

Interestingly, Liz was a devoted Christian, whose religious beliefs directly conflicted with her social life. Liz and her friends often argued about the subject of religion although they remained close, and despite their apparent differences, they regularly went to gay bars and clubs in and around London. Liz was somewhat overpowered and marginalised in the social group although James and the others involved her in their reciprocal relationships. James especially, often treated Liz to presents and weekend trips on birthdays and Christmas. Liz originally worked as a teacher, which meant she had limited amounts of money; however, she reciprocated their friendly gestures by regularly chauffeuring James and the others around.

Malcolm

Malcolm was a subtly effeminate man in his late 20s who had been living abroad for a few years before coming back to live in Compton. He did not have many acquaintances in the area and usually came to the *Freelands* on his own, mostly during the afternoons. As I discussed in the chapter on social roles, Steve disliked Malcolm for some reason, which meant he did not involve him in interactions. This was despite the fact that Malcolm usually came in during the afternoon when the *Freelands* was quiet and the managers tended to talk to the few customers sitting at the bar. Malcolm had aesthetic appeal although he lacked the social capital that enabled him to create new sets of

friends or enter existing social networks. He lived in the area and was financially insolvent, which limited his choices of places to go. Therefore, he did not go out to many of the places in and around London.

This situation changed when Jill came to manage the bar and brought a barmaid with her, Alice, who usually worked in the day. Alice and Malcolm became friends, which allowed Malcolm to participate in many more social networks. However, when Alice left, Malcolm also stopped coming to the bar and I rarely saw him afterwards.

Marcus

It seems quite comical that I used a pseudonym for Marcus as he already had a string of aliases. I had already worked with him three years before in a hotel where he was working under a different name. We only found out his real identity when he invited his mother to come and stay with him for the weekend. Marcus was originally from the Midlands and came to live in a housing estate outside of Compton. He was involved in a range of benefit frauds and sublet his council flat while he lived above the *Freelands*.

Marcus was in his mid twenties, but he already had a great deal of experience of gay culture, in its various forms. He was familiar with popular gay consumer culture while he also had experience of the marginal social geographies of prostitution and illicit public sex. Marcus had a difficult upbringing and animosity and deceit were part of an everyday reality for him. This was reflected in his participation in the bar's culture and in his performances as the barman; he played the role of effeminate queen with vigour and his facetious 'über-camp' alter ego was infamous around the bar. He used to enjoy discussing people and knew a great deal about other people's life. Unfortunately, he was also known to spread gossip, which then distanced him from many of the other customers.

Michael

Michael was a young man in his early 20s who worked in another leisure centre in Compton. He considered joining the police force although he decided against this and moved abroad instead. His youth and his physical appeal provided him with considerable aesthetic capital, without the need for elaborate 'packaging' through clothing and accessories. Consequently, he could easily move around from one social unit to another and he was known by many of the regulars. However, the majority of Michael's friends were of similar age, and like Nathan, he had many female friends. Most were straight girls, although one of his best friends was Jenni.

For a long time, Michael regularly came to the *Freelands* while also frequenting the more youth oriented upmarket gay bars in and around London. Within London, he went to popular places like *G.A.Y.* and *Manto's*, and he was a regular at venues like *Coast*, which appealed to the younger market. Like many of his contemporaries, Michael lived an openly gay life and his engagement with gay culture came through commercial hospitality venues. Because of this, Michael knew very little about cruising grounds and bathhouses; these kinds of social milieus and marginal geographies were mostly irrelevant to him

Mike

I have referred to Mike on numerous occasions throughout his thesis and his situation proved to be very illustrative. Unfortunately, I never managed to conduct any formal interviews with Mike; our obvious class differences and his suppressed dissident sexuality proved to be significant barriers. Nevertheless, our lengthy conversations were very informative.

Mike was a married man in his mid 30s who came to the *Freelands* very irregularly at first. He came from a homophobic family and his sexuality represented a hidden and troubling part of his identity. Mike always emphasised he was bisexual and not gay; he strongly disassociated himself from the clichéd, feminine performances of sexual dissidence and he was distanced from mainstream gay culture as a whole. Gay space was very alienating for Mike and the *Freelands* represented an accessible compromise between gay and straight space. Even here, he often lowered his voice when talking about his own sexuality. Despite this, he often talked candidly to me about his life and experiences.

Ethically, my conversations with Mike often made me feel uncomfortable and I struggled to reciprocate his involuntary help. I felt that showing patience and making him feel socially included through personal acts of hospitableness were an important part of this. Despite our class differences, we often laughed about very 'straight' subjects such as women and our occasional uncomfortableness with the performative nature of gay space. We shared a close proximity relation because we were both engaging with the *Freelands* through a more heterosexual gaze.

Nathan

Nathan was in his early 20s and worked as a nurse while studying performing arts. The background in arts required him to be physically fit and he had a great deal of natural aesthetic capital. Despite this, Nathan was not promiscuous and only had a few partners. The majority of his friends were of a similar age, although Simon, who was over ten years older than him, was also a close friend.

Nathan was well aware of the gay scene and dressed accordingly. However, he was a marginal participant in the actual consumption of commercial hospitality venues,

especially around London. Like many others, he had been a 'scene queen' when he first 'came out', but this lost its appeal as the novelty wore off. He knew many of the regulars in the *Freelands*, although he tended to stay with his friends or the unit he came with.

What is interesting to note is the number of straight girls Nathan had as friends. I have already referred to Nathan's role as both information disseminator and instigator; he often brought several young attractive girls with him to parties and theme nights. It is also worth noting that he always made the effort to dress up on theme nights and regularly danced when he was out. His enthusiasm for performing arts was reflected in his active participation in these 'spectacular' forms of entertainment.

Nicola

Nicola was a young lesbian in her early 20s who lived with Karen and formed part of her social network. She described herself as a typical 'dykey' lesbian, who dressed in a casual, sporty, 'masculine' way. She originally lived in one of the inner-city boroughs of London and moved to Compton several years before; she was working in social care at the time of the study.

Nicola was a regular at the bar and many people liked her. She knew many of the other regulars and could easily come in on her own and sit with people she knew. However, she often came with other female friends, mostly younger lesbians, but also a few younger men who associated with her and Karen.

Nicola and Karen had an argument and Karen eventually moved away with her girlfriend. Many of their other friends also stopped coming to the bar and their network as a whole disintegrated. She still came to the bar occasionally, but the customer profile had changed and she said she did not feel the same homeliness in the *Freelands* as

before. This coincided with the *Roadhouse* being taken over by two lesbians so many of the women started going there and to the *Coast* bar, which already had a big female following.

Patrick

Patrick was another civil servant in his late 20s, although he aspired to greater things. He invested considerable time, money and energy in his appearance. He certainly augmented his aesthetic capital through carefully co-ordinated presentations of self. Patrick lived in a slightly more impoverished area outside of Compton, although one would not have guessed this by his appearance or his spending.

Alongside John and James, Patrick was another 'hardcore' consumer who often went on weekend drink and drug binges. He was certainly one of the principal customers in the bar, often coming in many times a week and spending copious amounts of money. For a long time during Kate's time in charge, Patrick even worked at the *Freelands*. He could certainly use the *Freelands* as home territory and project his influence over both the space and the people. Because of his physical and financial visibility, he was a recognised principal and connected to a range of individuals.

Ritchie

Ritchie was small man in his mid 20s; I never really found out what Ritchie did for a living, although he always seemed to have a lot of money. I know Ritchie and his boyfriend Joe regularly sold goods at boot sales and the two of them were thoroughly knowledgeable about drugs and other illicit economies. The two of them ran a pub for a while although this only lasted for a few months.

Ritchie spoke in a rough 'cockney' accent and had a crude sense of humour. Jokes were often sexually oriented and the two of them were openly misogynistic and racist. He tended to be the milder and more stable one out of the two of them, although he could be just as aggressive as Joe could.

Steve and Dave were on good terms with both of them, which was largely due to their similarity in their class backgrounds. Furthermore, they were all more masculine and shared a common interests in general deviance and substance abuse. Despite this image, Ritchie was receptive to my work and he was enthusiastic about participating in the interviews. Moreover, they knew many of the nearby venues, including the *Roadhouse*, and had plenty of anecdotes about both the customers and the owners.

Robert

Robert was a very private gay man and I found out very little about him. He was in his early 30s and worked at the management level in social services. He refused to talk about his private life but I know he lived with his partner for a long time and the break-up of his relationship hit him hard. He started drinking uncontrollably and ended up incoherently drunk on most nights sitting alone at the bar. Robert had a university background and even considered starting a doctorate to coincide with his work on social care and social policy.

He was Damien's principal companion in the bar and the two of them often engaged in lengthy polemics about esoteric subjects. Robert's sexuality was not apparent from his clothing, mannerisms or speech; he did not adopt any of the terms of gay culture although I am sure he was familiar with them. In general, he did not frequent the scene and he very rarely engaged with others in the bar or gave the impression that he wanted to. Consequently, people rarely talked to him although he was not an antisocial person.

Robert gave the impression that he only engaged in worthwhile interaction and frivolous performances and games usually associated with the younger patrons did not seem to appeal to him. He eventually received a job offer and moved away from Compton.

Karen

Darren once described Karen as an: 'Alpha', which was an appropriate description. Karen was a curvaceous lesbian in her mid twenties and she certainly had presence. She was trained as a train driver, although she moved away from the area and gave up the job. For a long time, Karen lived with a group of her friends, who collectively formed a visible presence in the *Freelands*. Of course, Karen was a strong character in this unit and often projected her influence on others.

Karen lived with two of her lesbian friends and they socialised together a lot. Besides frequenting the *Freelands*, they also visited lesbian bars in London and even went to gay and lesbian venues in Brighton on occasions. Unlike Joyce and Kerri, Karen and her friends were a lot more involved with the contemporary lesbian scene and they offered me valuable insight into the scene as a whole.

Karen's social network was also broad and she often played important roles as both information disseminator and instigator. Meanwhile, because of her 'presence' and her hedonistic tendencies, Karen was often able to occupy and transform her social space to accommodate her needs.

Samantha

Sam was a divorcee in her late 30s who came into the *Freelands* via Leon, whom she had known for over ten years. She did not frequent many other gay bars except for the *Freelands* and she usually came in when Leon was there. Because of her relationship with Leon, she was welcomed by Leon's associates, which included James, Patrick, and John. Leon once referred to her as a 'fag-hag', although when I asked him to define 'fag-hag' he withdrew the comment. He said 'fag-hags' were: 'fat women who could not find men for themselves', which was not an adequate description of Samantha.

Samantha worked in fashion retail and she consciously enhanced her physical aesthetic capital through clothing, jewellery and handbags; she often wore provocative clothing and enjoyed the attention she received from Leon and his friends. Sam said she did not mind people in there looking at her, except for some of the: 'rougher lesbians.' Interestingly, she objected to being approached by the lesbians in the bar, although she was happy about Leon openly fondling her breast. This was a non-threatening aspect of their relationship and an accepted part of their interactional routines. She had a liberated attitude towards sexuality, particularly about men, and discussed her sex toys openly in the bar. Sam also brought her son to the bar on several occasions and used to take condoms home for him.

Scott

Scott represents another marginal character within the thesis, although it is worth commenting on him briefly. Scott was a small, slender, blond-haired man in his early 20s. He spoke in a very rough South-London accent, often starting and finishing his sentences with the words 'fuck' and 'cunt'. He was overtly gay and most people agreed

that he lived an openly gay life, even in heterosexual spaces in Compton. Scott was from a tough neighbourhood outside of Compton and he had become used to producing his social space aggressively.

He frequented a number of popular places on the gay scene and claimed to have a great deal of social and cultural capital. Scott knew many of the customers in the *Freelands* although he tended to be hostile to many of them and socialised selectively. I never really got a chance to know him personally and we did not particularly like each other; my sexuality, class position, and the interest Colin showed in my work, firmly established the proximity relations between us.

What was interesting was his long-term relationship with Colin. They shared many similarities in terms class position and education; however, their personalities contrasted significantly in terms of their receptiveness and their attitudes. Where Colin was undoubtedly a very broad-minded person, Scott tended to be cynical and abrasive. This tendency toward hostility and exclusion offered important clues about the way social positions and proximity relations were constructed. However, it was only through Colin's participation in the research that I was able to gain Scott's contributions.

Simon

Simon was in his early 30s and worked in the I.T. industry; he had spent his life living 'in the closet', and consequently, he was alienated from the gay scene and from the more overt expressions of gay identity. Simon was also unfamiliar with the more marginal sexual geographies of cruising grounds; these were also moral and aesthetic territories from which he felt excluded.

Physically, Simon did not have the aesthetic qualities of the popular young gay ideal; nevertheless, he played in two different sports teams (which represented more overtly

heterosexual cultures). In general, he tended to drink in straight bars and very rarely went out to gay bars or clubs; gay space was potentially alienating for him, and consequently, Simon remained a marginal participant in 'dissident geographies'. He was more comfortable in heterosexual social spaces and identified more closely with straight cultures.

This is not to say he was not familiar with popular cultural genres, although he did not participate in mainstream gay culture. Interestingly, he was friends with Nathan, who represented everything that Simon was distanced from. Nathan tried, with various levels of success, to introduce Simon to contemporary gay spaces and cultures, although he remained a hesitant and sceptical participant.

Steve

Steve first started working at the *Freelands* while Shawn and Fifi were running the bar. After Shawn and Fifi left, Steve took over the bar and ran it for over a year before he was fired for theft. Like Fifi and Marcus, Steve was working under false documents while simultaneously claiming a series of benefits elsewhere. He was the sole manager of the *Freelands*, although his partner lived there at the same time and usually helped clean the bar.

Steve was in his late 30s and originally from the North of England where used to work as an administrator in the civil service. Because of his social background, he was more familiar with the marginal geographies of sexuality; he was once married and fathered several children before 'coming out' and moving down to London. Steve knew many of the cruising areas in both the town and in the surrounding counties. Conversely, he did not frequent the popular gay areas of the city such as Soho.

Outside of the *Freelands* or a gay environment, Steve's sexuality was not obvious; his arms and hands were covered in tattoos, and when he did not shave for two days, he looked quite intimidating. He tended to dress in a very casual, masculine way, wearing loose jeans and shirts. However, when he was behind the bar, these apparent signifiers of sexuality were overshadowed by his overt camp performances.

Steve was a veteran of the licensed trade and had worked in a number of gay and straight pubs around London. The *Freelands* was his first managerial appointment and he made a concerted effort to maintain the venture; he invested a lot of time in decorating the bar and paid attention to the cleanliness and the general standards. In contrast to this, Steve also indulged in amphetamines and engaged in numerous shady deals around the bar.

His class background, interests in drugs and his understanding of gay life significantly influenced the social order of the bar, and largely determined his networks of friends. This is why he used such an eclectic set of semiotic strategies to construct the place-image of the *Freelands* as gay space. For example, he hung the rainbow flag in the bar, insisted on upbeat dance music throughout the week and transformed an American pedestrian crossing sign to flash the words 'wank/don't wank'. Steve often had the closest proximity relations with older, 'straight-acting' people, especially the more 'down-to-earth' 'working class' clientele. As I mentioned before, he got on well with Dave, Joe and Ritchie. Despite this, he played the role of friendly 'landlady' enthusiastically and enjoyed the banter with the clientele; that is, when he was not hung over or coming down off drugs.

Tom

Tom was another important character in the *Freelands*' history as he was the bar's official DJ. As with John and many others, this allowed him to combine his leisure time with work. During the daytime, Tom worked in radio and he used his access to music to make CDs for the bar, which we played in his absence. He was passionate about music, which was the central theme in his life (besides his interest in men).

Tom was a stocky man in his early 30s and had a reputation for being a promiscuous man. He augmented his aesthetic appeal by wearing contemporary fashionable club-style clothing; he was well aware of the gay scene in general although he strongly disliked both the scene and the more camp gay performances; he was very masculine and 'straight-acting' himself although he was good friends with many of the more effeminate people in the bar, including Patrick and Leon.

Tom knew many of the people in the bar through his DJ-ing and he engaged in numerous affairs. Despite this, he did not seem to find himself the right man for a long time. He spent much of his time feeling happy about having just met someone, but then feeling depressed when these encounters failed to blossom into long-term relationships. He eventually met a young man, quit his DJ job in the *Freelands* and stopped coming to the bar.

Warren

Warren was in his mid 20s and lived with Daniel near the *Freelands*. However, he did not share Daniel's enthusiasm for the *Freelands* and was a lot more discriminating in terms of the sorts of people he mixed with. For example, Warren strongly disliked drugs and disliked anyone who took drugs.

Warren had high levels of aesthetic capital and invested heavily in his physical appearance; one of his best friends was a hairdresser and he often displayed elaborate fashionable hairstyles. He worked as a restaurant manager in Compton and tended to socialise in the more upmarket gay venues in London. In general, he mixed with 'professional' and 'socially-mobile' individuals and consciously avoided the 'rougher' elements in the *Freelands*.

As with Daniel, Warren was well aware of the 'scene' and the various performances of gay identity. However, in contrast to Daniel, Warren was much more overtly gay, both in his mannerisms and his appearance.