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GENTRIFICATION, CULTURAL POLICY AND LIVE MUSIC IN MELBOURNE

Abstract

This paper examines the regulation of nightlife in Melbourne, with a special focus on live music venues. Widespread gentrification of the city centre and inner suburbs has recently created considerable tension between residents and venues. Under pressure from both sides, the state government established the Live Music Taskforce in 2003, and its findings resulted in a semi-formal — albeit largely symbolic — policy reorientation towards the protection of existing music venues. Through a case study of the Live Music Taskforce policy development process, the author argues that the Bracks government's creative cities development strategy and its overriding economic motivations have, in this instance, intersected with the broader cultural needs of Melbourne. However, such productive intersections can in no way be assured by creative industries planning models, whose interest in cultural activity is conditional upon its economic value.

Introduction

A fantasy of unlimited experiential possibility, urban nightlife is at the same time the end-result of complex configurations of capital and governance. Overlapping technologies of regulation, from the subcultural (dress styles) to the bureaucratic (liquor licensing), underwrite even the most spontaneous party, gig or rave. This paper seeks to establish a theoretical framework for the valorisation and protection of urban nightlife — specifically, live popular music — at a moment when its regulatory environment is being radically reshaped by gentrification and the turn towards 'creative cities' planning models. While others have argued for regulatory protection of Australian music cultures from the perspective of artists' rights (Johnson and Homan, 2002; Homan, 2000), or by defending the aesthetic value of live popular music through discourses of artistic expression and subcultural resistance (Breen, 1993; Gibson and Homan, 2004; Shaw, 2004, 2005), this paper will complement those perspectives by stressing the broader *social* — and, where necessary, *economic* — value of nightlife practices in Melbourne.

This will be achieved through a case study of the Live Music Taskforce. Established in 2003 by the Victorian government, the taskforce was given the task of defusing the escalating conflict between newly arrived inner-city/inner-suburban apartment-dwellers and the music venues whose long-term viability was now under threat from an increased incidence of noise complaints. Though it had been simmering for several years, this issue began to attract media attention when several key venues (including the Empress Hotel, a live music institution in inner-suburban North Fitzroy) were forced to drop or curtail their live music

programs following objections from a handful of residents.[1] The taskforce's recognition of first-occupancy rights was subsequently incorporated into local government planning policy, a move which was hailed as a victory for the live music lobby but which, in many cases, has not been enough to ensure the protection of threatened venues.

By forging a strategic alliance between ostensibly irreconcilable economic and cultural imperatives, the creative cities discourse favoured by the Bracks government played a crucial part in this policy shift. However, such productive intersections are in no way guaranteed by creative cities planning models, whose respect for cultural activity is invariably conditional upon its economic potential.

Nightlife/culture/consumption

From a sociological perspective, nightlife can be understood as one manifestation of the broader field of leisure practices, which in turn are a side-effect of industrialisation. In modern capitalism, leisure functioned as a way of filling in 'empty time' (Rojek, 1995: 6) without adversely affecting the productivity of workers, and to this day the temporality of Melbourne live music culture still tends to be determined by the nine-to-five working week (Frith, 1983: 251). Even though pubs no longer have to shut at 6.00 p.m. (as was the case until the late 1960s) and 24-hour licences are now relatively common, the long-standing tradition of a Friday or Saturday night out remains largely intact.

In postmodern capitalism, however, leisure increasingly revolves around *consumption*. While alternatives exist (free raves, house parties, street parties), nightlife practices tend to be underwritten by the purchase of alcohol, clothes, cigarettes and food. More pessimistic perspectives maintain that the romanticised liminality of pubs and clubs is nothing more than an inducement to such consumption (Hobbs et al., 2000: 713), as is the broader sphere of popular music in general (Buxton, 1990). Alternatively, we could read nightlife practices as elaborations of 'cultural capital'. This term was coined by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1984), who famously suggested that cultural activities operate as signifiers of distinction. In this schema, a string concerto and a death metal gig both function as markers of class, policed and regulated through *taste*. Writing on British club cultures, Sarah Thornton (1995) has extended this notion to include 'subcultural capital', which she argues is a more fluid and less class-bound variation. Intimately related to media consumption, subcultural capital may be embodied (speech, movement) or objectified (possessions, fashion), and functions as 'the linchpin of an alternative hierarchy' (1995: 105), which nonetheless replicates the inequalities of the dominant social order. The subcultural capital required to make sense of street press, rave flyers or online forums thus functions to create and regulate scenes, or taste groupings around shared aesthetic and social values.

Approaches such as these are revealing in that they illuminate some of the underlying ideologies that structure leisure time, but they do not always help us understand another aspect of nightlife: its potential uses. Given that large amounts of both capital and labour are invested in the act of going out, it may well be

more productive to focus on what *can be made of* these practices. As Richard Dyer famously wrote regarding disco: 'Capitalism constructs the disco experience, but it does not necessarily know what it is doing.' (1992: 151; see also Chatterton and Hollands, 2003: 238) The same can be said of nightlife in a broader sense. Ethnicity, gender, class and sexuality all still matter in pubs and clubs, but they matter in ways that are frequently different from their impact in day-to-day life. Nightlife opens up a space for a new set of experiential possibilities, no matter how partial, contingent or complicit they may be. The symbolic energy invested in the *fantasy* of nightlife (the promise of sex, drugs, transgression) need not necessarily operate as a safely annexed complement to labour/consumption time. In all nightlife practices, there is an aspect of liminality — a potential space in which identities may be formed and reformed, tried on and discarded. Furthermore, as I shall shortly demonstrate, nightlife also tends to function as an *economic* engine with significant flow-on effects for other sectors. If only for this reason, government policy towards nightlife should begin to shift from viewing it as a problem to be controlled towards understanding it as a social practice to be protected.

Regulating nightlife: Trends and challenges

The small-scale turf wars currently being waged between Melbourne's music community and its development lobby may be thoroughly localised in nature, but at the same time they are shaped by the ebbs and flows of global capital and are also representative of broader spatial phenomena affecting cities all over the world. Two researchers who have produced some authoritative work in this area are Paul Chatterton and Robert Hollands, whose study of the current state of nightlife in the United Kingdom (2003) is both fascinating and alarming. Chatterton and Hollands point to the increasing concentration of venue ownership amongst a small number of (frequently multinational) corporations; the ongoing privatisation of public space; higher levels of social and spatial inequality amongst nightlife users; sophisticated market segmentation strategies; and an increasingly non-participatory nightlife culture (2003: 9–10). Their work represents a valuable reminder that seemingly spontaneous, street-level consumption is always-already global in nature — for instance, multinational Interbrew recently paid a mind-boggling £1 billion for the Becks beer brand (2003: 367).

However, while the corporate dominance that Chatterton and Hollands identify is certainly an issue to be taken seriously, its manifestations in Melbourne are — for the moment at least — somewhat more benign. Melbourne consumers are notoriously protective of their local nightlife, and the scene's history is full of failed attempts by Sydney-based or overseas groups to crack the local market. A case in point is the $65 million Lion Nathan/Kirin pub buyout in 2000. Seeking exclusive distribution points for their Tooheys beer brand, the New Zealand-based multinational purchased 50 Melbourne pubs, including several key live music venues. However, the buyout was a spectacular failure (Gettler, 2004: 2). Tooheys beer proved so unpopular that many pub managers, fearing loss of custom, resorted to secretly serving rival brands Carlton Draught and Victoria Bitter through

unmarked beer taps. Lacking the subcultural capital required for success in the fickle Melbourne market, Lion Nathan sold off its Melbourne pub portfolio for $16 million in May 2004 (Evans, 2004: 16).

What is most interesting about these events is the fact that many venues, even when under Lion Nathan ownership, chose to retain their pre-existing live music programs — the Builders Arms in Fitzroy, for example, continued throughout its Lion Nathan phase to host its long-running queer night (Q&A) as well as a vibrant roster of bands and DJs. This suggests that, even when pubs are owned by corporates, the diversity of their entertainment offerings may not necessarily be compromised, as the path of competitive advantage frequently 'leads away from regulation and restraint toward an invitation to transgression' (Hobbs et al., 2000: 703). However, what the Lion Nathan example also demonstrates is that the highly localised knowledges and competencies required for success in local markets tend to function as an obstacle for acquisitive corporates. Keeping tabs on the ephemeral Melbourne scene is the kind of cultural work which cannot easily be done from a boardroom in Chicago or Singapore. In this sense, the 'tacit city knowledge' (O'Connor, 2004) of the local consumer can function as a defence against cultural homogenisation.

Another potential challenge comes in the form of what John Hannigan (1998) has identified as a global trend towards 'fantasy cities' — themed, branded and sanitised UEDs (Urban Entertainment Districts). Taking Las Vegas as its exemplar, the fantasy city is a 24-hour, modular development model which is increasingly popular in the United States, Canada and China. Melbourne's Crown Casino complex and its Docklands redevelopment are examples of this tendency, which can also be seen on a smaller scale with the ubiquity of chains like Hard Rock Café, Planet Hollywood, Starbucks and even the (relatively) sanitised Spearmint Rhino strip clubs.

However, there is evidence to suggest this trend may also be on the way out. Even Las Vegas has found that family-friendly, theme park-style development is not a viable long-term model, and more racy entertainment is now making a comeback (McCarthy, 2005: 6B). In Melbourne, Docklands apartments are selling well below expectations, and even those nightlife venues which parade their exclusivity (usually top-end cocktail bars) rarely stay exclusive for long. Drop into the Westin Hotel Martini Bar, the Sofitel bar, Honkytonks or The Long Room on a Friday evening and you are more likely to meet white-collar call centre staff than globetrotting creative-class cognoscenti. In other words, the fact that sanitised, fantasy-framed or socially exclusive venues are spreading like wildfire in inner-urban areas does not tell us much about what happens within these spaces, which are regularly — albeit temporarily — reclaimed and reinvented by a wider cross-section of the population than their owners may have originally desired.

A more significant threat to nightlife diversity has come in the form of urban gentrification, which has resulted in huge changes to the social geography of Melbourne — in the CBD alone, 13 500 new residencies will have been built between 2000 and 2010 (Costello, 2005: 55). Gentrification is another global phenomenon whose effects can be seen everywhere from the Meatpacking district of Manhattan to the Ribera area in Barcelona (Chatterton and Hollands, 2003:

64–65). In each case, ferociously competitive property developers sell fantasies of inner-urban bohemia to investors, young professionals and early retirees. Having paid royally for their new pads, these gentrifiers expect high amenity levels from their investments, while many existing residents are effectively priced out of the market. The rising rents that inevitably follow are particularly cruel to musicians who, for various reasons, tend to live near where they work (Gibson and Homan, 2004: 76).[2]

Although its effects are frequently insidious, gentrification cannot be understood through totalising us-versus-them discourses. In many cases, the new residents who write letters of complaint to councils are themselves prodigious consumers of nightlife (Chatterton and Hollands, 2003: 64). Nor are gentrifiers an homogenous social group. In their analysis of Sydney's live music scene, Gibson and Homan (2004: 76) note that many new, middle-class residents of the rapidly gentrifying Newtown area are left-leaning politically, and that artists and musicians themselves usually play an unwitting role in the gentrification process. Finally, it should also be noted that different regions of Melbourne are at different stages of gentrification, with varying results for nightlife. As a result of modest change, the city's northern suburbs are in fact experiencing a proliferation of new live music venues (The Retreat, The Brunswick Hotel, Northcote Social Club, Bar 303), frequented by newly arrived young professional and student populations.

At the other end of the spectrum is the bayside suburb of St Kilda, formerly a haven for artists and musicians and now a magnet for property developers. In the later stages of gentrification, St Kilda must now balance the needs of a new and highly articulate DINK population with the messy street-level culture so expertly marketed by real estate agents. Gentrification here has squeezed out much of the region's Indigenous community and has changed the suburb's social demographics profoundly (Kerkin, 1998). The historic Esplanade Hotel, at one point earmarked for demolition, was the subject of a passionate battle between the music community and developers Becton that lasted several years. The latest flashpoint is the Palace entertainment complex, one of Melbourne's few remaining large-capacity non-stadium venues, which the state government wishes to see bulldozed to make way for a new 'public plaza'. Disappointingly, Port Philip Council's response to the music community's protests has been to remove the public's right of appeal to the planning process (Topsfield, 2004).

Having outlined some of the issues facing consumers and venue owners, both here and overseas, I will now offer a case study of a recent instance of policy development which demonstrates the politically sensitive nature of live music regulation in Melbourne.

The Live Music Taskforce

As a practice and a product, popular music is regulated unevenly across local, state and federal levels of government, and this section begins with a brief account of some of the key policy trends to have emerged since the 1970s.

Historically, federal policy has been of limited relevance to nightlife and live music. While calls for increased federal government intervention in the recorded

music industry are common (Breen, 1993; Turner, 1989), the live music industry has largely been ignored at a national level, even though federal initiatives such as anti-drink driving campaigns and the introduction of the GST have had significant consequences for bands and patrons (Homan, 2000). Indeed, until the Labor governments of the 1980s, popular live music was never valued on cultural or aesthetic terms. Despite some small-scale Australia Council initiatives (especially during the Creative Nation policy moment), successive federal governments have tended to adopt a hands-off approach to live popular music, a field which remains 'one of the least protected and most radically free-market or "commercial" of the culture industries' (Bennett, 1993: 9).[3]

It is at the state and local levels that the major decisions affecting live music culture are made. These two levels of government frequently see things differently, and even within each level divisions emerge — for instance, clashes between elected local councillors and planning bureaucrats are common. Nightlife regulation is thus a multi-jurisdictional affair, with responsibility shared between local government planning bodies, police, the Department of Justice (Liquor Licensing division) and the Department of Sustainability and Environment.

At all levels of government, however, live music tends to be conceived of in terms that are fundamentally different from those which frame arts or sports events. In general, government policy in Australia tends to display the same tendencies that Lovatt and O'Connor identified in their study of UK nightlife:

> [N]ightlife [is] not a legitimate object of attention other than as something to be regulated or contained … It [is] a heavily regulated zone of space and time; a location for transgression conceived in terms of social dysfunction. In short, a problem. (1995: 130)

The Live Music Taskforce policy process largely follows this logic.[4] The taskforce was established by State Planning Minister Mary Delahunty in June 2003 in response to increased media coverage and music industry lobbying, most of which was orchestrated by the newly formed Fair Go 4 Live Music collective (FG4LM) in the wake of a series of venue closures and a public meeting which attracted over 1000 people. Chaired by Geelong MP Elaine Carbines, the taskforce included representatives from residents' groups, music industry associations, government departments and the development lobby. The consultation process included a call for public submissions (224 were received), case studies of venues, and a series of workshops and public meetings. The taskforce went to great lengths to appear consultative with all stakeholders, and the four-month timeframe ended up blowing out to seven months. The Bracks government announced its acceptance of all the report's recommendations in May 2004, and a state planning provision amendment was passed three months later.

The report's primary recommendation was that 'the onus of responsibility for the cost of noise management should fall upon the "agent of change"' (Carbines, 2003: 4) — in other words, it recognised the rights of first occupancy. The report also recommended the streamlining of inter-departmental processes for noise complaints and the creation of an online one-stop shop to advise stakeholders on how to manage noise-related issues. (At the time of writing, no such resource

yet exists.)

Broadly speaking, this report represented a victory for the music lobby, albeit at a largely symbolic level. The report's engagement with complex issues of cultural value (its discussion of music versus noise semantics, for example) was relatively sophisticated, and it also recommended that live music be officially recognised in the wording of the state government's arts policy. In this sense, it was a significant improvement upon earlier policies, and was certainly light years ahead of that of the Liberal opposition, whose primary response has been to slam the report and the 'pen pushers' behind it as a waste of taxpayers' money (Austin, 2005: 3).

However, such comments must be qualified. First, the report did not seek anything new from developers, such as the 'buyer beware' clause sought by FG4LM. Second, the report *deferred* rather than resolved several key issues by establishing a Live Music Taskforce Implementation Group. (At the time of writing, *Hansard* records no mention of the activities of this group, which was to convene in September 2004.) And finally, while mapping out a general policy direction, the report did not recommend any new legislation or new regulatory bodies (2004: 4); in effect, it handed control of the issue back to local government, which is where the crucial decisions will be made.[5]

Nor does the report offer much in the way of protection for *new* venues. One proprietor interviewed for this paper spoke of the highly political nature of licensing applications in the CBD. Having signed a lease for an inner-city bar/venue, the proprietor applied to Melbourne City Council for a 5.00 a.m. liquor licence. This was rejected several months later, and an 11.00 p.m. licence was granted instead, following objections by a group of residents in a CBD apartment block 150 metres away. According to the interviewee, council staff strongly implied that her licence application would eventually be granted, but suggested that an appeal would have to be lodged with the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal first because the council had to be seen to be doing the right thing by residents. (Such an appeal would have cost up to $12,000 in legal fees.) Timing was a key factor here: the application was rejected shortly before the hotly contested 2004 council elections, and the councillor responsible for the decision was one of only two to retain their seats — a fact which, the interviewee felt, strongly influenced the councillor's decision. The residents eventually withdrew their objections and a licence was granted with several provisos: operating hours were reduced substantially, and the proprietor was obliged to install both electronic noise inhibitors with cut-out facilities (as is now the case for many CBD bars) as well as expensive bottle-compacting machines to reduce garbage-collection noise.

This example points to the political influence of residents' groups in shaping planning policy, as well as the tendency for government bodies to pass the buck. There also seems to be a great deal of confusion *within* councils in relation to licensing matters — for instance, the prospective venue had been awarded a sizeable grant by Melbourne City Council to fund audio-visual equipment for a series of multimedia art exhibitions, prior to the venue even being granted the liquor licence which it required to operate as a business. The interviewee also pointed out that many new residents had been lured into buying city property by

council marketing initiatives such as the Postcode 3000 campaign, and thus felt they were owed extra consideration in amenity matters.

In this example, and in the taskforce report itself, we can see two competing policy objectives at work: law and order, and economic growth.[6] The former is an ever-present discourse in nightlife regulation, and is invariably informed by moral panics of one sort or another. Recent examples in the Melbourne context include GBH drug scares, meningococcal outbreaks in nightclubs, high-profile seizures of ecstasy shipments by police, 'hoons' discourses (see, for example, Boulton, 2005), Melbourne underworld mythologies, and the media frenzy that surrounded the death of cricket coach David Hookes outside a St Kilda hotel. Arguments against nightlife on the basis of community safety are often informed more by these moral panics than by fact — for example, evidence exists to suggest that the 'natural surveillance' created by a vibrant nocturnal streetlife is more effective than many official policing measures (Montgomery, 1995: 106). Furthermore, the concept of 'amenity' is an offshoot of law and order discourses, and one that is not ideologically neutral. As Homan notes, the 'centrality of property ownership to amenity debates embod[ies] the implicit values of suburban life' (2000: 41).

Ultimately, it was the second policy objective — development, and thus revenue — which won out over the law and order argument in this instance. Unfortunately, it appears that the social and cultural value of live music was never much of a consideration; rather, it happened to overlap with the economic argument, which in turn was heavily influenced by creative industries discourses.

Nightlife and creative industries

An integral element of the Bracks government's development strategy is the creative cities model that is currently shaping policy around the world. Though the roots of creative industries discourse stretch back to UNESCO initiatives of the 1960s (Hesmondhalgh and Pratt, 2005: 3), most accounts credit Tony Blair's British 'New Labour' government with the popularisation of this planning model. The Bracks government has taken creative industries rhetoric to heart, and its 2004 arts policy, *Creative Capacity+*, waxes lyrical about 'an economy based on innovation' (Arts Victoria, 2004: 14). In this sense, it does not break ranks with the precedents established by the former Liberal premier Jeff Kennett's *Arts 21* policy, with its emphasis on value-chains and 'market-aware' artists (Jacobs 1997: 15–16).

For our purposes, we will follow John Hartley's definition of creative industries as 'the conceptual and practical convergence of the creative arts (individual talent) with cultural industries (mass scale), in the context of new media technologies (ICTs) within a new knowledge economy, for the use of newly interactive citizen-consumers' (2005: 5).

Creative industries discourse thus represents a way around high/low binaries and romanticised, modernist notions of art. It offers an alternative to those 'traditional taxonomies of industry' which are arguably ill-equipped to deal with the complexity of post-Fordist economies (Hesmondhalgh and Pratt, 2005: 6). It

understands live music not as an art-form but as an integrated part of the new 24-hour economy, one which generates flow-on effects for other sectors such as security, transport, hospitality and fashion.

However, creative industries discourse can be a dangerous ally for several reasons. First, it is difficult to know where the hype stops and the analysis starts in much of the creative industries literature. As Angela McRobbie (2002: 521–26) reminds us, so-called creative work frequently goes hand in hand with long hours, an erosion of industrial rights, inequitable recruitment policies and non-existent job security — but unfortunately there has been relatively little attention paid by researchers to the labour politics of the new creative classes. Equally worrying is the imbalance between the term's constituent concepts, creativity and industry, for in practice the latter tends to co-opt the former (O'Regan, 2002: 22; O'Connor, 2004: 146–49). In the new creative economy, artists and educators are required to be market-focused, but obligation rarely flows the other way.

Thus, as an increasingly sophisticated argument for economic deregulation, the 'benign narrative' of creative industries in fact represents an invitation to:

> annex the culture of cities, their creativity and urbanity to that of innovation and competitiveness in globalised 'commodified cultural production' — throwing in cultural infrastructure, historical traditions and the local 'structure of feeling' for good measure (O'Connor, 2004: 146).

Nonetheless, within policy circles, creative industry discourse is too pervasive to ignore. For this reason, in a spirit of pragmatic engagement — of 'talking to the ISAs' (Bennett, 1992: 31) — I will now use this dominant vocabulary to argue for the importance of nightlife within the creative economy. For if live music venues continue to disappear at the present rate, Melbourne's future as a creative city will be bleak.

According to the most prominent proponent of creative cities discourse, Richard Florida, 'street-level culture is a must' (2005: 140) — creative cities require a cosmopolitan street-life in order to attract and retain skilled workers and cultural tourists. As Hobbs et al. (2000: 705) argue, 'the existence of a thriving night-time economy is now taken as a prerequisite for any city hoping to make a claim upon progressive profitability'. Nightlife is thus a crucial ingredient in what urban planners call *animation culturel* (Montgomery, 1995: 104), or the 'soft infrastructure' of a creative city.

Little research has been conducted into the importance of live music to Melbourne's economy, but a group of Queensland University of Technology researchers made the connection abundantly clear in their report on Brisbane's live music scene, which has faced many of the same problems (Flew et al., 2001). The report argues convincingly on economic grounds for the regulatory protection of Brisbane music venues:

> Development of a vibrant night-time economy is a critical element of Brisbane's development as a creative city … Current approaches to code and legislation development governing planning, zoning, liquor licensing and

noise regulations threaten the development of these sectors … The future of live music venues in Brisbane is especially threatened in the absence of such changes. (2001: 10)

For this reason, enforcing spurious noise complaints from articulate gentrifiers is not in the interests of Melbourne's economy, let alone its music community, its youth population and anyone else for whom the consumption of live music is a rich and potentially transformative experience.

There is also a *productive* side to nightlife, in both a cultural and an economic sense. Pubs and clubs are potent sites of networking and information exchange, of O'Connor's 'tacit city knowledge' (2004). According to O'Connor's account of Manchester's revitalisation throughout the 1990s, it was these localised knowledges, as expressed *through popular culture* (e.g. the Manchester scene), that provided the 'symbolic charge' behind the city's development as a creative hub (2004: 145–49). As he explains:

signs are plugged into global circuits; the local culture transforms these into something unique and thus able to be re-sent out into the world. Crucially this local culture is that of the city, the vibrant metropolis. This is the crucible where innovative consumption meets ear-to-the-ground production; where the ideas, skills, rivalry, part-time jobs, support networks and distribution outlets of the 'innovative milieu', the 'art world', the 'creative field', come together. (2004: 134)

Gigs, parties and club events are all key sites for this 'coming together'. Nightlife is not only about hedonism; it is also a site for the exchange of ideas, gossip and speculation — the tacit knowledges which underwrite creative cities. We should also bear in mind the elaborate information networks which operate behind the scenes — poster design and distribution, email lists, online forums, street press and so on. The informal knowledge economies that frame nightlife consumption are prototypes for creative industry models (McRobbie, 2002) and are public sphericules of exchange and debate in their own right. At a purely economic level, then, their continued vibrancy is a precondition for the long-term economic success of any creative city. For this reason, the live music community may be better served by the diversion of artist-specific popular music grants (such as the state government's $1.8 million Music for the Future program) towards soundproofing or other dispute resolution initiatives to safeguard the long-term viability of venues, which remain the lynchpin of live music culture in Melbourne. Alternatively, a live music infrastructure fund could be created from a modest levy on inner-urban apartment projects or poker machine revenue, as is currently the case in South Australia.

But perhaps the most important lesson we can take away from the Live Music Taskforce example concerns the fickle nature of creative industries discourse itself. The creative industries model values culture only for its economic potential, and has little interest in the array of less cosmopolitan cultural activities that do not register on its city-centric radar. While the survival of events with quantifiable economic benefits seems assured (Melbourne Film Festival, Melbourne Food

and Wine Festival, and so on), many others will not fare so well. However, the tacit city knowledges of Melbourne music patrons have successfully undermined corporate buy-out attempts and fantasy-city sanitisation, and the growth of online forums such as InTheMix and Mess+Noise is contributing to the emergence of networked and politically astute consumption communities. The lobbying efforts seen in the Live Music Taskforce policy process are an example of the kinds of community activism rendered possible by these informal nightlife networks, and they represent a promising strategy in what looks likely to be an ongoing battle to protect the diversity of urban nightlife cultures against the vicissitudes of global capital and the not-so-benign narrative of co-opted 'creativity'.

Acknowledgment

Notes

1 The following are just a few of the venues negatively affected by noise complaints in the last three years: The Cornish Arms (Brunswick), Esplanade Hotel (St Kilda), Zimmer Bar (St Kilda), Tramway Hotel (Fitzroy), Bar 303 (Northcote), Republika (Collingwood), Terminus Hotel (Clifton Hill), Amy's Curry Family Hotel (Collingwood), Rainbow Hotel (Fitzroy), Hardiman's Hotel (Kensington), Matrix (CBD), Revolver (Prahran), Ding Dong (CBD), Metropolitan (CBD) and Honkytonks (CBD).

2 While beyond the parameters of this paper, we should also bear in mind Homan's argument that 'the complex of urban regulatory networks engenders a unique sense of cultural place/space', which in turn shapes the formal elements of musical production (2000: 33; see also Cohen, 1991). 1980s pub rock and contemporary Australian hip-hop are two examples of musical genres in which performance spaces (and hence the regulation that shapes them) are crucial determinants of a 'sound'. Many Melbourne bands have reported that modifications to their performance style, brought about as a result of noise restrictions, have given rise to new performance practices (for example, using drum brushes rather than sticks) and songwriting styles (quieter, balladic compositions). A member of the Melbourne band The Frantics reported that, instead of 'playing ten punk rock songs and one mellow one, we started writing this crooner stuff' (Button, 2004: 2).

3 One 1978 Federal Industries Assistance Commission report even concluded that: 'Australian music had no more claim to special cultural relevance than music from any other part of the world.' (quoted in Breen, 1993: 71) Twenty years later, Coalition frontbencher Peter Reith showed his contempt for live popular music when, responding to proposed Labor funding initiatives, he exclaimed: 'Does this mean young people will be able to sit around and strum a guitar and get the dole?' (quoted in Homan, 2003: 18) Furthermore, it should be noted that, even when popular music has been ascribed cultural value, its worth has generally been assessed using high-art taxonomies of aesthetic excellence. For instance, the 1987 Federal Parliamentary Budget Commission report (the 'McLeay Report') 'co-opt[ed] popular music into the high-cultural domain of "the arts" so that, thereby, it might derive legitimacy as a suitable publicly funded activity' (Breen, 1993: 74–75).

4 A subsequent state government report by the Inner City Entertainment Precincts Taskforce (overseen by the Department of Justice) goes even further, contradicting many of the findings of the Live Music Taskforce and recommending a raft of populist law-and-order solutions to the 'problem' of nightlife (Tomazin, 2006: 7).

5 A recent ban on under-age events in the CBD illustrates the volatile regulatory atmosphere in which live music venues operate. Following the bashing of a Metro Nightclub bouncer at an

under-age event held there in October 2004, the state Liquor Licensing Authority slapped an indefinite ban on all under-18s events in the city (O'Neil, 2004: 27), causing the cancellation of several gigs by local and international bands. The ban was lifted six months later, but it nevertheless represents a harsh regulatory response to what was an isolated incident of violence.

6   It is worth bearing in mind that much of Melbourne nightlife runs as a cash economy, so it is possible to argue that government interest in the revenue potential of this sector also informs its sporadic regulatory interventions (Hobbs et al., 2000: 702).

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