Imagining Neighbourhood-Based Community: An autoethnography

by

Michelle Hall

Bachelor of Arts, University of Queensland
Graduate Certificate of Business, Queensland University of Technology
Master of Business (Research), Queensland University of Technology
Graduate Certificate of Research Commercialisation, Queensland University of Technology

Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Institute of Creative Industries and Innovation
Faculty of Creative Industries and Design
Queensland University of Technology
Brisbane

25th March 2013
Key Words

Autoethnography, Community, Consumption, Consumption Experiences, Consumption Space, Gentrification, Imagination, Imagined Community, Northcote, Melbourne, Place, Public Space, Public Sociality, Quasi-public Space, Space
Abstract

Imagining Neighbourhood-Based Community: An autoethnography

This research is an autoethnographic investigation of consumption experiences, public and quasi-public spaces, and their relationship to community within an inner city neighbourhood. The research specifically focuses on the gentrifying inner city, where class-based processes of change can have implications for people’s abilities to remain within, or feel connected to place. However, the thesis draws on broader theories of the throwntogetherness of the contemporary city (e.g., Amin and Thrift, 2002; Massey 2005) to argue that the city is a space where place-based meanings cannot be seen to be fixed, and are instead better understood as events of place – based on ever shifting interrelations between the trajectories of people and things. This perspective argues the experience of belonging to community is not just born of a social encounter, but also draws on the physical and symbolic elements of the context in which it is situated. The thesis particularly explores the ways people construct identifications within this shifting urban environment.

As such, consumption practices and spaces offer one important lens through which to explore the interplay of the physical, social and symbolic. Consumer research tells us that consumption practices can facilitate experiences in which identity-defining meaning can be generated and shared. Consumption spaces can also support different kinds of collective identification – as anchoring realms for specific cultural groups or exposure realms that enable individuals to share in the identification practices of others with limited risk (Aubert-Gamet & Cova, 1999). Furthermore, the consumption-based lifestyles that gentrifying inner city neighbourhoods both support and encourage can also mean that consumption practices may be a key reason that people are moving through public space. That is, consumption practices and spaces may provide a purpose for which – and spatial frame against which – our everyday interactions and connections with people and objects are undertaken within such neighbourhoods.
The purpose of this investigation then was to delve into the subjectivities at the heart of identifying with places, using the lens of our consumption-based experiences within them. The enquiry describes individual and collective identifications and emotional connections, and explores how these arise within and through our experiences within public and quasi-public spaces. It then theorises these ‘imaginings’ as representative of an experience of community. To do so, it draws on theories of imagination and its relation to community. Theories of imagined community remind us that both the values and identities of community are held together by projections that create relational links out of objects and shared practices (e.g., Benedict Anderson, 2006; Urry, 2000). Drawing on broader theories of the processes of the imagination, this thesis suggests that an interplay between reflexivity and fantasy – which are products of the critical and the fascinated consciousness – plays a role in this imagining of community (e.g., Brann, 1991; Ricoeur, 1994). This thesis therefore seeks to explore how these processes of imagining are implicated within the construction of an experience of belonging to neighbourhood-based community through consumption practices and the public and quasi-public spaces that frame them.

The key question of this thesis is how do an individual’s consumption practices work to construct an imagined presence of neighbourhood-based community? Given the focus on public and quasi-public spaces and our experiences within them, the research also asked how do experiences in the public and quasi-public spaces that frame these practices contribute to the construction of this imagined presence?

This investigation of imagining community through consumption practices is based on my own experiences of moving to, and attempting to construct community connections within, an inner city neighbourhood in Melbourne, Australia. To do so, I adopted autoethnographic methodology. This is because autoethnography provides the methodological tools through which one can explore and make visible the subjectivities inherent within the lived experiences of interest to the thesis (Ellis, 2004).

I describe imagining community through consumption as an extension of a place-based self. This self is manifest through personal identification in consumption spaces that operate as anchoring realms for specific cultural groups, as well as
through a broader imagining of spaces, people, and practices as connected through experiences within realms of exposure. However, this is a process that oscillates through cycles of identification; these anchor one within place personally, but also disrupt those attachments. This instability can force one to question the orientation and motives of these imaginings, and reframe them according to different spaces and reference groups in ways that can also work to construct a more anonymous and, conversely, more achievable collective identification. All the while, the ‘I’ at the heart of this identification is in an ongoing process of negotiation, and similarly, the imagined community is never complete. That is, imagining community is a negotiation, with people and spaces – but mostly with the different identifications of the self.

This thesis has been undertaken by publication, and thus the process of imagining community is explored and described through four papers. Of these, the first two focus on specific types of consumption spaces – a bar and a shopping centre – and consider the ways that anchoring and exposure within these spaces support the process of imagining community. The third paper examines the ways that the public and quasi-public spaces that make up the broader neighbourhood context are themselves thrown together as a realm of exposure, and considers the ways this shapes my imaginings of this neighbourhood as community. The final paper develops a theory of imagined community, as a process of comparison and contrast with imagined others, to provide a summative conceptualisation of the first three papers.

The first paper, chapter five, explores this process of comparison and contrast in relation to authenticity, which in itself is a subjective assessment of identity. This chapter was written as a direct response to the recent work of Zukin (2010), and draws on theories of authenticity as applied to personal and collective identification practices by consumer researchers Arnould and Price (2000). In this chapter, I describe how my assessments of the authenticity of my anchoring experiences within one specific consumption space, a neighbourhood bar, are evaluated in comparison to my observations of and affective reactions to the social practices of another group of residents in a different consumption space, the local shopping centre. Chapter five
also provides an overview of the key sites and experiences that are considered in more detail in the following two chapters.

In chapter six, I again draw on my experiences within the bar introduced in chapter five, this time to explore the process of developing a regular identity within a specific consumption space. Addressing the popular theory of the cafe or bar as third place (Oldenburg, 1999), this paper considers the purpose of developing anchored relationships with people within specific consumption spaces, and explores the different ways this may be achieved in an urban context where the mobilities and lifestyle practices of residents complicate the idea of a consumption space as an anchoring or third place. In doing so, this chapter also considers the manner in which this type of regular identification may be seen to be the beginning of the process of imagining community.

In chapter seven, I consider the ways the broader public spaces of the neighbourhood work cumulatively to expose different aspects of its identity by following my everyday movements through the neighbourhood’s shopping centre and main street. Drawing on the theories of Urry (2000), Massey (2005), and Amin (2007, 2008), this chapter describes how these spaces operate as exposure realms, enabling the expression of different senses of the neighbourhood’s spaces, times, cultures, and identities through their physical, social, and symbolic elements. Yet they also enable them to be united: through habitual pathways, group practices of appropriation of space, and memory traces that construct connections between objects and experiences. This chapter describes this as a process of exposure to these different elements. Our imagination begins to expand the scope of the frames onto which it projects an imagined presence; it searches for patterns within the physical, social, and symbolic environment and draws connections between people and practices across spaces.

As the final paper, chapter eight, deduces, it is in making these connections that one constructs the objects and shared practices of imagined community. This chapter describes this as an imagining of neighbourhood as a place-based extension of the self, and then explores the ways in which I drew on physical, social, and symbolic elements in an attempt to construct a fit between the neighbourhood’s offerings and my desires for place-based identity definition. This was as a cumulative but
fragmented process, in which positive and negative experiences of interaction and identification with people and things were searched for their potential to operate as the objects and shared practices of imagined community. This chapter describes these connections as constructed through interplay between reflexivity and fantasy, as the imagination seeks balance between desires for experiences of belonging, and the complexities of constructing them within the throwntogether context of the contemporary city.

The conclusion of the thesis describes the process of imagining community as a reflexive fantasy, that is, as a product of both the critical and fascinated consciousness (Ricoeur, 1994). It suggests that the fascinated consciousness imbues experiences with hope and desire, which the reflexive imagining can turn to disappointment and shame as it critically reflects on the reality of those fascinated projections. At the same time, the reflexive imagination also searches the practices of others for affirmation of those projections, effectively seeking to prove the reality of the fantasy of the imagined community.
Table of Contents

Key Words ........................................................................................................ i
Abstract .............................................................................................................. ii
Table of Contents ............................................................................................... vii
List of Figures and Tables .................................................................................. x
Related Publications and Presentations .......................................................... xi
Statement of Original Authorship .................................................................... xiii
Acknowledgements ............................................................................................ xiv
Chapter One – Introduction ............................................................................. 1
   Why Imagine Community in the Contemporary City? ............................... 3
   Thesis Structure and Chapter Summaries ..................................................... 7
Chapter Two – Literature Review .................................................................... 13
   Theories of Collective Identifications and Place within the Contemporary City 14
      Community and the Imagination................................................................. 19
         The fiction of community .................................................................. 21
         Community and reflexive imagining ..................................................... 23
         The imagined presence of community ................................................. 26
         Imagining neighbourhood-based community within the throwntogetherness 29
   Cities, Unfixed Place and Consumption ....................................................... 30
      Public and quasi-public spaces as anchoring realms ............................... 34
      Public and quasi-public spaces as exposure realms ............................... 38
   Conclusion .................................................................................................... 43
Chapter Three – The Research Context: Northcote, Melbourne .................... 47
   The Building of Northcote .......................................................................... 49
   The City of Northcote, Between and Beyond the Wars ............................... 53
   Northcote Today .......................................................................................... 58
      Northcote today in policy .................................................................... 58
      The social shape of Northcote today ...................................................... 64
      Representations of Northcote today ....................................................... 68
      Northcote and I ....................................................................................... 73
   Conclusion .................................................................................................... 74
Chapter Four – Research Methodology ........................................................... 76
   The Autoethnographic Methodology.......................................................... 77
   Data Collection Methods ............................................................................ 82
   Data Analysis: Analysing interaction, emotion and imagination ................ 85
   The Ethical Considerations of Autoethnography ....................................... 88
   Research Limitations .................................................................................... 90
   Conclusion .................................................................................................... 91
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Critical and Fascinated Imagining of Community</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Methodology and Context</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place-Identification and the Beginnings of Imagining Community</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Searching for Objects: The problem of the social</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Searching for Objects: The problem of memory traces</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imagining Community through Shared Practices</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imagining the Presence of Community Across Public and Quasi-public Spaces</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Nine – Conclusion: The Reflexive Fantasy of Imagined Community</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anchoring and Personal Identification in Public and Quasi-public Spaces</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exposure and Collective Identification across Public and Quasi-public Precincts</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Reflexive Fantasy of Imagined Community</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Figures and Tables

Figure One: Northcote (Profile id, 2010b) ............................................................... 50
Figure Two: The route of my walk ................................................................. 141
Figure Three: High Street according to the Northcote Business Association 142
Figure Four: Northcote Plaza according to the marketing agents ............................. 143
Figure Five: Pathways to the Plaza ................................................................. 146
Figure Six: (Empty) shop-top living at the Plaza ..................................................... 146
Figure Seven: Enjoying the sunshine in the Plaza ................................................. 148
Figure Eight: The ballet of the Plaza ................................................................. 149
Figure Nine: The Plaza as an anchoring realm ...................................................... 150
Figure Ten: Underutilised public space at Northcote Central ................................. 153
Figure Eleven: Waiting for the lights to change .................................................... 153
Figure Twelve: Different speeds of High Street time ............................................. 155
Figure Thirteen: High Street in the past, present, and future .................................. 156
Figure Fourteen: Empty public space ............................................................... 158
Figure Fifteen: In the gentrified precinct ........................................................... 159

Table One: Selected characteristics of the Northcote population .......................... 65
Table Two: Northcote age groups ......................................................................... 65
Table Three: Household composition in Northcote ............................................... 66
Table Four: Educational qualifications of Northcote residents ............................... 66
Table Five: Occupations of Northcote residents .................................................. 67
Related Publications and Presentations

The following publications and presentations have been produced in the conduct of the research of this thesis. The four publications listed first constitute the body of this thesis by publication. In addition to these, sections of the methodology, literature review, and chapters six and eight draw from material prepared for and presented at international research conferences. The conference presentations listed below were all vital to the process of review that informed the eventual final publications and the thesis considered as a whole.

Publications


Conference Presentations


Hall, M. (2009), What can consumer research contribute to research on how quasi-public spaces may support neighbourhood-based community? *The Australian Sociological Association Conference, 1–4 December, 2009, Australian National University, Canberra.* (abstract submission)
Statement of Original Authorship

The work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted to meet the requirements for an award at this or at any other higher education institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made.

Signed

QUT Verified Signature

Date

7\textsuperscript{th} December 2012
Acknowledgements

Once again I find myself in debt to the business owners, staff, and customers of the shops of my neighbourhood. Much gratitude in particular is due to those who’ve become my friends. I’m looking forward to not having to talk about this anymore. Thanks are also due to my family and friends, for asking, and not asking, and in particular to Andrea – for lots of things.

My thanks is also due to my supervisors Professor Greg Hearn and Professor Judy Drennan, for trusting me to just get on with it (and the occasional You Tube video). Zenobia Frost also provided some much appreciated proof reading and copy editing assistance.

Finally, in recognition of the importance of non-human elements, this PhD would not have been possible without the view from my lounge room window, red wine, and the cat.
Chapter One
Introduction

Imagination turns space into place insofar as it is equally a propensity for projecting human feeling into a space and a readiness to be affected by its local presences (Brann, 1991, p.751).

… the underlying concern [is] – balancing the superficial and a/the need for deeper connections – how realistic is it to think that in my circumstance, that it would be possible to partition off one need and be satisfied with the other? Clearly it is not. … Or perhaps now that I can see that who I am may be reinforced by growing social connections, I am wondering which I (self) that will be? (Research notes, 2\textsuperscript{nd} February 2009).

This thesis explores the imagining of neighbourhood-based community through an autoethnographic investigation of consumption practices, and experiences within the public and quasi-public spaces that frame them. The purpose of this investigation was to delve into the subjectivities that are at the heart of identifying with places, through the lens of our consumption-based experiences within them. Accordingly the thesis describes individual and collective identifications and emotional connections, and explores how these arise within and through our experiences within public and quasi-public spaces. The research theorises these imaginings as representative of an experience of community, and then explores the ways this imagined community is constructed through my own experiences of living, consuming, and striving to belong in an inner city suburb in Melbourne, Australia.
The key question this research explores is:

*How do an individual’s consumption practices work to construct an imagined presence of neighbourhood-based community?*

Given the focus on public and quasi-public spaces and our experiences within them, the research also asks:

*How do experiences in the public and quasi-public spaces that frame these practices contribute to the construction of this imagined presence?*

This thesis describes imagining community through consumption practices and the public and quasi-public spaces that frame them as extension of a place-based self. As suggested in the quotes above, this is a highly personal process where identity and its relation to people and space are continually negotiated. This oscillates through cycles of individual and collective identification, in which positive and negative experiences of interaction and identification with people and things are searched for their potential to operate as the objects and shared practices of imagined community. This process was characterised by experiences that disrupted my imaginings, leading me to question their orientation and motives, and to reflexively reframe them according to different spaces and reference groups. In doing so I also emplace the collective of the imagined community within a broader neighbourhood space, whilst affirming a place-identity that more closely reflects the varying aspects of my self. All the while, the *I* at the heart of this identification is in an ongoing process of negotiation, and similarly, the imagined community is never complete. That is, imagining community is a negotiation, with people and spaces – but mostly with the different identifications of the self.

The investigation of the process described in this thesis draws on my own experiences of moving to, and attempting to construct connections within, an inner city neighbourhood in Melbourne. I arrived in this neighbourhood with limited knowledge of the area or city, and no established social networks, meaning it presented a unique opportunity to investigate how consumption practices, community, and imagination may come together for an individual seeking to shift from stranger to local. To explore this shift, this research adopted an autoethnographic approach. This is a methodology that encourages the reflexive exploration of subjective processes (Ellis, 2004), and thus provided the
methodological tools through which explore the subjectivities that are at the heart of the problem of this research. This thesis has been undertaken by publication, with each of the data chapters written as distinct papers that address an aspect of the process of imagining community. The latter section of this introduction thus provides a detailed overview of the content of these individual papers, as well as information on their publication. The following section provides a brief overview of the theoretical framework that shaped this investigation of imagining community.

**Why Imagine Community in the Contemporary City?**

This research was inspired by the shifting nature of the contemporary city and the potential for community within it. My interests specifically focus on gentrifying inner city areas, where class-based processes of change can have implications for people’s abilities to remain within or feel connected to place. Gentrification research would point to issues of displacement, or the restructuring of place identifications and attachments, brought about by an interplay between property investment that is often policy-driven, and the consumption preferences of the incoming middle classes (see Lees, Slater, & Wyly, 2008). However, this thesis argues such neighbourhoods may also be viewed as spaces where multiple trajectories, moving at different speeds of time, come together within a small geographic area to construct certain kinds of situated multiplicity (Amin, 2008; Massey, 2005).

In the gentrifying suburbs of Australian cities these trajectories may include cosmopolitan and technologically savvy fragments of the middle class, the broad acceptance of consumption-based socialising and lifestyle practices, increases in arts and cultural industries, as well as cafes and bars, flexible or non-traditional employment, an appreciation of diversity, property investment and speculation, place-making and marketing activities, government supported residential densification, socio-economic and demographic shifts in the population, changes in use of historical buildings, and so on; all these come together in ways that can seem to both support and undermine the potential for place-based community. This thesis aims to explore how individuals seek experiences of identification and community within these shifting environments, in ways that look beyond the rhetoric of

*Chapter One: Introduction*
gentrification, and instead focus on the subjectivities of this process of place-based identity definition.

To do so, this thesis draws on recent theories of the sociologist Urry and geographers Massey and Amin. These theorists have argued that to consider the nature of community in contemporary societies we need to look beyond proximous relations, and also take into account the manner in which the different temporalities and mobilities of people and objects, as well as processes of consumption and imagination, also work to shape these experiences (e.g., Amin, 2007; Amin & Thrift, 2002; Urry, 2000). Their call is based on a recognition that the entanglement of human relations with elements of global and local material culture means that our practical experiences of both community and place become less fixed (Amin & Thrift, 2002; Urry, 2000).

Instead spaces are described as having a throwntogetherness, or multiplicity; formed through the coming together of trajectories of people, objects, history and time (Amin, 2008; Massey, 2005). Within this multiplicity there can be no assumptions of a pre-given coherence of place identity, with the suggestion they are instead constructed through moments of encounter (Massey, 2005). These theories also argue for the consideration of the role of the non-human and the immaterial, including imagination and affect, in our constructions of experiences of place, and therefore our attempts to experience belonging in relation to it (Amin & Thrift, 2002). However, such theories also raise questions as to how individuals construct meaningful place-identifications within these shifting environments. It is these attempts at constructing experiences of belonging – and the ways they are shaped by encounters with people, spaces, representations, and imaginative processes – that is the focus of this thesis.

In this thesis I specifically consider neighbourhood-based community, and the manner in which this may be supported by consumption practices and the public and quasi-public spaces that frame them. This is because consumption spaces and activities are an important driver of gentrification processes, and as this thesis argues, can be seen as a fertile ground in which to situate the varying spatial and temporal elements of a neighbourhood. Consumer research tells us that consumption practices can facilitate experiences in which identity-defining meaning can be
generated and shared (e.g., Caru & Cova, 2007; Holbrook, 1999; Vargo & Lusch, 2004). Through their physical, symbolic, and social elements, consumption spaces also offer the potential to generate and emplace meaning in ways that can be both individually and collectively identity-defining (Aubert-Gamet & Cova, 1999; Bitner, 1992; Sherry, 1998b). This may be through operating as anchoring realms for specific cultural groups or social networks, as well as by bringing diverse groups of people together in exposure realms in ways that may work to habituate difference through low-level interaction (Aubert-Gamet & Cova, 1999; Wise, 2011).

Furthermore, the consumption-based lifestyles that gentrifying inner city neighbourhoods both support and encourage can also mean that consumption practices may be a key reason that people are moving through public space. That is, consumption practices and spaces may provide a purpose for which – and a spatial frame against which – our everyday interactions and connections with people and objects are undertaken within such neighbourhoods.

What is of interest to this thesis then are the ways these different physical, social, and symbolic elements are consolidated into an identity that becomes the basis from which that neighbourhood is understood. That is, how an individual’s consumption practices and experiences within the public and quasi-public spaces that frame them may work to construct an imagined presence of neighbourhood-based community.

As noted above, the research was particularly focused on the subjectivities that are at the heart of those identifications, based as they are on value constructions and emotional responses to interactions with people and things within contexts where a pre-given coherence of place-identity cannot be assumed. To explore this subjective construction of identification and belonging, the thesis draws on theories of imagination, and its relation to community.

To construct a framework of the imagining of community, this thesis draws on Benedict Anderson’s (2006) concept of nations as imagined communities; Urry’s (2000) construct of the imagined presence; and Ricoeur’s (1994) description of the processes of the productive imagination. The concept of imagined community first came to prominence in Anderson’s theory of how nation states were able to present a collective culture and identity, despite the fact that both the universality of shared value, and the possibility for social relations with all community members are

Chapter One: Introduction
imagined constructs (2006). Using the concept of simultaneous actions, Anderson describes how shared actions and experiences enable community members to overlook discrepancies in an individual’s interpretations and use of the symbolism of community, and also in the ways individuals experience the values that are said to define it. In his discussion of belonging within contemporary societies, Urry (2000) similarly argues for the ability of objects to create symbolic links of community that can cross time, space, uneven social relations, and categorical differences. According to Urry this is possible because objects can carry memory traces that stimulate and structure people’s imaginings, and in doing so are able to communicate the presence of a community across its members, even when those members may not be fully conscious this community exists. These theories remind us that the shared values and identities of community are imagined, and that these communities are held together by projections that create relational links out of objects and shared practices. This thesis argues that this conceptualisation of community as constructed or reinforced through an imagined presence, embedded in objects or shared practices, offers a useful framework through which to consider the ways community may be constructed within the shifting context of a gentrifying inner city neighbourhood.

To explore how this presence of imagined community is constructed, the thesis looks to theories on the processes of the imagination. In particular, the research draws on Ricoeur’s theories of the productive imagination and its relation to the reflexivity and fantasy of the critical and fascinated consciousness (1994). Ricoeur’s framework is useful because it provides a lens through which to explore the relationship between the processes of the imagination and the construction of community. The association of community with fantasy is familiar in community theory, and one which Bauman (2001) in particular argues means that our quests for community within contemporary society are ultimately unachievable. This thesis argues that the insecurity generated by these unsatisfied fantasies highlights the manner in which our emotions are implicated within these projections. This is because the productive imagination creates a presence that feels real, despite its fictional nature. Thus we can argue that the emotions that become attached to achieving community (or failing to) are as much an element of imagining community as the desire for an experience of belonging. At the same time however, theories of the imagination argue that we are also able to use our productive imagination to critically reflect on reality, and to
do so we draw on an anonymous *they* against which to benchmark that imagining (Ricoeur, 1994; Taylor, 2004). Furthermore, as suggested in Anderson’s theory of imagined community, the symbols and norms of this anonymous collective are themselves constructed through the imaginings of its individual members. That is, we draw on the (imagined) shared values and norms of a specific community, or society, to make assessments of our own behaviours (or imaginings), which themselves constitute the imagined community.

These theories suggest that whilst our imaginings of community may be fictional, and prone to idealistic fantasy at times, these fantasies themselves play a role in the construction of the social imaginary against which they are evaluated. And whilst some authors argue this sets our dreams of community up for constant disappointment, others suggest that our awareness of the construction instead allows us to more fully appreciate the ephemeral nature of the experience of belonging. Finally, although these collective identifications rely on imagined shared values, the sheer fact that these are imagined means they also allow space for individual differentiation. Thus whether or not one believes that imagined community can offer a sufficiently real experience of belonging, it could be argued it is successful precisely because we willingly suspend our disbelief as we oscillate between an emotionally present fiction of belonging and a reflexive recognition of its fleeting and constructed nature. It is these negotiations of the imagination, and the ways that they are implicated in the construction of an experience of belonging to neighbourhood-based community through consumption practices and the public and quasi-public spaces that frame them, that are the focus of this thesis. The following section describes the structure of the resultant thesis and details the arguments of the publications that make up the thesis chapters

**Thesis Structure and Chapter Summaries**

This thesis has been undertaken by publication, with each of the chapters five, six, seven and eight written as distinct papers that address an aspect of the process of imagining community. Each chapter includes an additional introduction and conclusion that relates the specific focus of the individual paper to the thesis
research question, and draws links between the papers and the literature outlined in chapter two. Chapter three expands on details of the research context included in the specific chapters, with an overview of the history, demographics, and identities of the Melbourne neighbourhood of Northcote in which this thesis research was conducted. A background to the methodology of autoethnography, and the manner in which it was applied here is discussed in chapter four. Chapters five and six are published papers. Chapter seven has been accepted for publication in an edited volume on the Mobility Method, Ethnography and the City, edited by Tim Shortell and Evrick Brown from City University New York. Chapter eight has been submitted for review to the journal Space and Culture, which is published by Sage.

In addition to the published and accepted chapters outlined above, sections of the methodology, literature review, and chapters six and eight draw from material prepared for and presented at international research conferences. This included the 2010 conferences of the Urban Affairs Association, the European Consumer Research Association, the International Sociological Association World Congress, and the RC21 Urban and Regional Research conference in 2011. The full details of these publications and presentations are listed in the section on relevant publications in the forward matter of this thesis. The remainder of this section provides further details of the published and submitted chapters.

Chapter five provides an introduction to the empirical work, and the key public and quasi-public spaces of this thesis. In that chapter, the manner in which consumption practices and spaces support experiences of individual and collective identification is explored through a theoretical framework of authenticity. This framework was adopted in direct response to the 2010 work by Sharon Zukin, *Naked City: The death and life of authentic urban places*, in which she introduced a range of theories regarding the way that assessments of authenticity are made with regard to urban experiences. As my research was concerned with many of the issues that Zukin raised, particularly those of consumption practices and identifications within gentrifying neighbourhoods, Zukin’s theories offered a useful alternative framework through which to consider the research data and explore its relevance outside of the lens of imagination adopted for this thesis.
Drawing on theories of authenticity as applied to personal and collective identification practices by consumer researchers Arnould and Price (2000), this chapter described a process of making assessments of the authenticity of my experiences of my neighbourhood based on comparisons between my personal authenticating acts, and collective authoritative performances. In doing so, I was also constructing the cues of imagined community, as I negotiated between personal and collective identification that was fuelled by comparative observations and emotional responses. The chapter was published in 2010 in the 12th volume of the Research in Consumer Behavior series published by the Emerald Group, which was edited by Professor Russell Belk, from York University in Toronto, Canada.

Chapter six was published in October 2011 in the Zone edition of M/C Journal, for which Professor Greg Hearn and I were guest editors. M/C Journal publishes short papers through online open access, with the intention that they be accessible to an audience beyond the author’s specific academic discipline. The aim of this edition was to explore the concept of zones, and the ways that these physical, social, and metaphorical spaces shape our individual and collective experiences, movements, and beliefs. In line with the journal aim to explore issues of culture in ways that are broadly relevant and accessible, I chose to focus on the issue of third places. These are consumption spaces that are familiar in popular culture as the corner pub or cafe in which ‘everybody knows your name’. However, as is discussed within the literature review, the easy sociality that is associated with such spaces can be problematic.

The aim of the paper included here was to provide a contemporary and accessible investigation of these types of consumption spaces. To do so I describe the processes through which I developed a regular identity within a bar, Harry’s. This journal article considers the purpose of developing anchored relationships with people within specific consumption spaces, and explores the different ways this may be achieved in an urban context where the mobilities and lifestyle practices of residents complicate the idea of a consumption space as an anchoring or third place. It also more explicitly focuses on the processes of personal identification that were raised in chapter five, to consider how this is constructed through an interplay of attempts to personally identify with a regular collective, and also individually identify as a
regular in a way that enabled me to project the regular identity to non-regular others. In doing so, this chapter also explores the manner in which this type of regular identification may be seen to be the beginning of the process of imagining community.

In contrast to the focus on an individual type of consumption space in chapter six, in chapter seven I consider the ways the broader public and quasi-public spaces of the neighbourhood – its consumption precincts – work cumulatively to communicate different aspects of the neighbourhood’s identity. Focusing on my everyday experiences and movements through the area’s shopping centre and main shopping street, this chapter incorporates the influence of the built environment, history, and movement into this investigation of consumption practices and imagined community. The chapter specifically draws on the theories of Urry (2000), Massey (2005), and Amin (2007, 2008), to describe how these spaces operate as exposure realms, enabling the expression of different senses of the neighbourhood’s spaces, times, cultures, and identities through their physical, social, and symbolic elements.

In particular the chapter considers the ways that our everyday negotiations of the different elements of these spaces may work to reframe the identifications and attachments developed through anchoring processes, by expanding spatial frames or linking disparate actions or groups. This chapter proposes that, as we habituate exposure spaces through our movements through them, we draw on memory traces to create patterns and connections between people and practices, and across spaces. It argues that these memory traces, and the ways they construct connections between objects and experiences, forms the basis of the imagined presence. In this respect, this chapter also sheds light on the longer-term meaningfulness of fleeting encounters in public spaces, arguing that it is their ability to trigger memories and hopes for the future that enables these connections to take the form of the shared practices of an imagined community. This chapter has been accepted for inclusion within an edited volume on Mobility Method, Ethnography and the City, edited by Tim Shortell and Evrick Brown from City University New York and proposed for publication with Temple University Press in 2013.

Chapter eight returns to the core concept of imagined community, and seeks to explore how those encounters with and in Northcote’s public spaces could be said to
be operating as the objects and shared practices that form the basis of that imagining. This chapter explores this process through theoretical frameworks of imagination and attachment, describing the construction of these layers of meaning as they occur through my negotiations of encounters with people, objects, and discourses. In particular, the chapter focuses on the interplay between Ricoeur’s (1994) construct of the critical and the fascinated consciousness, and considers their roles in the construction of imagined community. The imagining of community is described as a cumulative but fragmented process in which positive and negative experiences of interaction and identification with people and things were searched for their potential to operate as objects and shared practices. This was characterised by experiences that disrupted my fascinated imaginings, leading me to question the orientation and motives of those imaginings, and to reflexively reframe them according to different spaces and reference groups. In doing so, I also emplaced the collective of the imagined community within a broader neighbourhood space, whilst affirming a place-identity that more closely reflected the varying aspects of my self. This chapter has been submitted to the journal Space and Culture, which is published by Sage.

Chapter nine, the final chapter, integrates the different theoretical and contextual focuses of the individual papers to present the conclusions of this autoethnographic exploration of the ways an individual’s experiences may work to construct the imagined presence of neighbourhood-based community. This chapter describes the imagining of community as a reflexive fantasy that implicates both the critical and fascinated consciousness within the imagining processes. The chapter concludes that fascinated consciousness imbues experiences with hope and desire, which the reflexive imagining can turn to disappointment and shame as it critically reflects on the reality of those fascinated projections. At the same time, the reflexive imagination also searches the practices of others for affirmation of those projections, effectively seeking to prove the reality of the fantasy of the imagined community.

This chapter also summarises the research findings according to the processes of anchoring and exposure, and describes the imagining of community as requiring opportunities to personally identify and emotionally invest in people and places, as well as opportunities to distance oneself from that investment, so as to be able to recognise those experiences in the practices of others. From a neighbourhood environment.
perspective, this reinforces the importance of a diversity of public and quasi-public spaces that different cultural groups are able to individually identify with, and highlights that we cannot overlook the importance of spaces that may be viewed by some as mundane or commodified, yet offer anchoring potential for others. I suggest that these findings also reinforce arguments regarding the potential of open and lightly regulated public spaces to operate in ways I have termed exposure realms. In particular the thesis supports claims regarding the important role the physical and symbolic play in this exposure, by highlighting the ways these contribute to the construction of the imagined presence.

Finally, in line with the potential of autoethnography to inspire readers to reflect on their own experiences, the final chapter concludes with a series of questions. These are aimed to inspire the reader to consider their own imaginings of community and the manner in which they may be supported, by reflecting on their neighbourhood in relation to their sense of self, and considering the ways they may use their consumption practices and experiences within its public and quasi-public spaces to support their imagining of community. The following chapter, chapter two, presents an overview of the literature on community, imagination, place, and consumption spaces to develop the framework of this thesis.
Chapter Two
Literature Review

This thesis is interested in the ways that community may function at the conjunction of consumption practices and place. In particular it explores how public and quasi-public spaces and our experiences in them may work to support the imagining of community. Therefore this chapter reviews a range of theories on community, imagination, place, and consumption spaces to develop a framework through which this process is examined in this thesis. The literature review is structured as follows.

The first section provides a brief overview of theories of community and place as they are seen to operate within contemporary societies, with an emphasis on theories that explore community as an experience of belonging that is constructed within this fluid and networked environment. This section introduces theories of imagined community, and explores the ways the values and shared identities of such communities are held together by projections that create relational links out of objects and shared practices. I then explore imagination more broadly, describing its reproductive and productive elements, and then delving further into the relation between these specific imaginative acts and community. The purpose is to draw out the manner in which imaginative processes operate in relation to imagined community so as the provide a framework through which to consider how consumption practices and the public and quasi-public spaces that frame them can support the imagining of community in an inner city neighbourhood.

The review then turns to research on public and quasi-public space, and in particular consumption spaces, to consider the ways that they may support these processes of imagining and work to connect them to a specific place. This section summarises research on the potential of such spaces to support social interaction and collective identification as anchoring and exposure realms. The review then considers how these realms may contribute to the manner in which we may imagine community through our experiences within them. The chapter conclusion provides a summary of the issues raised through this review of literature, and details the research questions that have guided this investigation of imagining neighbourhood-based community.
Community is a contested and value-laden term. As a theoretical concept it lacks a clear definition, and is perhaps most simply understood as being concerned with belonging (Day, 2006; Delanty, 2003). Community has been described as a ‘god word’ (Bell & Newby, 1971): an expression of a utopian vision that embodies the quest for the perfect society (Bauman, 2001; Day, 2006; Delanty, 2003). It is also a common term in everyday language; it is used to describe neighbourhoods, nations, groups of people united through shared ethnicity, religion, sexuality, and through the use of a product or brand. This varied usage also highlights the disparity between what community is idealised as being, and what we experience it to be in everyday life (Bauman, 2001; Young, 1986).

Belonging itself can be understood as a dynamic emotional attachment that relates individuals to their material and social worlds; this is about feeling at home, secure, recognised and understood (Wood & Waite, 2011). This experience of belonging to community is recognised as operating in a range of forms and contexts that can be theoretically distinguished as being based on local, social, and affective elements (Bell & Newby, 1976; Tonkiss, 2005). Local communities are those where shared value and identity are primarily experienced through embodied interaction that is structured through placement and proximity (Tonkiss, 2005). An attachment to particular places or people is a feature of this type of community (Bell & Newby, 1971). Social communities describe those that are formed through shared behavioural norms and value systems, rather than by proximity (Tonkiss, 2005). These communities often rely on institutions, symbols, and ritualised practices to communicate and reinforce their identity, such as the identifiable styles of dress used by some religious or sub-cultural communities. Affective community is that which is primarily conceptual, freely entered into, and held together by shared experiences often based on fleeting interactions, and communicative acts (Delanty, 2003; Maffesoli, 1996). Such communities tend to be abstract and mobile, existing only in the moment in which they are experienced. For this reason they are more attuned to reinforcing individual identity and emotion than contributing to a greater good (Bruhn, 2005; Maffesoli, 1996), and have been criticised for a subsequent inability
to generate long-term ethical commitments (Bauman, 2001). More broadly, whilst these modes of experiencing belonging may be able to be distinguished conceptually, they are less distinct in practice. Thus, whilst the context and shared value or identity that structure a community may differ, communicative acts, symbols and ritualised practices, interactions, and emotional responses all remain important elements in any community’s construction.

This thesis is interested in communities based within geographic areas – what I will term neighbourhood-based or place-based community. However it also seeks to explore the manner in which these communities are held together by imagination, communicative acts, and emotional responses. This approach is in line with recent work of academics such as Urry, Amin, and Thrift on the nature of communities in contemporary societies and cities. They have argued that we need to look beyond proximous relations, and also take into account the manner in which the different temporalities and mobilities of people and objects, as well as processes of consumption and imagination, work to shape these experiences (e.g., Amin, 2007; Amin & Thrift, 2002; Urry, 2000). These theorists seek to shift the emphasis from the context in which community may form, to the experience of being in the community. It is this experience of belonging – and the ways it is shaped by our encounters with people, spaces, and representations – that is the focus of this thesis.

These authors’ calls for a post-humanist approach to contemporary society in general, and the urban context in particular, is based on a recognition that the entanglement of human relations with elements of global and local material culture means that our practical experiences of both community and place become less fixed (Amin & Thrift, 2002; Urry, 2000). Within this conceptualisation, contemporary societies are recognised to be shaped by visible and hidden flows: of money, information, people, and objects, which are able to act across considerable distances and in ways that cannot be seen to be determined by some undergirding social logic (e.g., Amin, 2008; Latham & McCormack, 2004; Urry, 2000). The importance of the immaterial is also emphasised within this approach, such that the influences of precognitive reflexes, affective atmospheres, the senses, and the imagination all become significant elements in the construction of our experiences of cities (e.g., Amin & Thrift, 2002; Latham & McCormack, 2004; Thrift, 2005; Tonkiss, 2005).
The unstable nature of these flows and the subjectivities involved in making sense of them is well captured in Massey’s concept of throwntogetherness (2005). Massey introduces this term to describe the ways these trajectories come together in a moment of negotiation and are then dispersed, at different times, speeds, and directions. For Massey, places are best understood as a collection of stories-so-far, whose meaning is generated through our negotiations of those trajectories (2005). That is, it is the manner in which we make sense of the ways that these varying spatialities and temporalities come together that emplaces meaning.

Yet despite being mobile, open, and distanciated, these societies are still anchored in moments of shared experience according to Urry (2000). This is because people still intermittently come together to be with others in the present, in moments that can create intense feelings of belonging, as was noted earlier with regard to affective communities. Urry expands on the potential of these fleeting experiences of belonging by considering how they may relate to dwelling, and be shaped by the varying temporalities and spatialities that make up our contemporary societies. Thus he argues that our mobilities play an important role in shaping our understandings of a community, such as when habitual pathways connect different areas of a place into a lived experience, or movement between places clarifies differences and reinforces meaningful anchors (see also Massey, 1994; Savage, Bagnall, & Longhurst, 2005).

Savage et al., (2005) also emphasise the importance of these kind of relational assessments of spaces in their theory of elective belonging, describing how individuals make comparisons between different places as part of the process of mapping their biographies on to places. In this respect then our mobilities can also be mental, drawing on attachments, memories, and flows of information, as much as physical movement itself.

The importance of these mental links, or memory traces as Urry terms them, also highlights the influence of temporalities, which Urry describes in terms of instantaneous time, clock time and glacial time (2000). In an argument later echoed by Massey (2005), Urry emphasises the extent to which people and objects can appear to signify different speeds of time, which has implications for the ways we negotiate their trajectories. Thus historical or natural objects such as buildings and trees may project memory traces that signify glacial time, whereas the projections of
media images or mobile communications may be more ephemeral or instantaneous. Urry suggests these projections can operate as an imagined presence, which is able to cross time, space, uneven social relations, and categorical differences. According to this perspective, contemporary place-based communities can be characterised by thick co-present interaction, and instantaneous webs and networks that are stretched corporeally, virtually, and imaginatively across distances, all coming together to produce a distinct sense of localness that can be reinforced by (and reinforces) a presence of community (Urry, 2000).

However, as noted, a significant aspect of these theories of mobilities and trajectories is the insistence on unsettling place, suggesting that there can be no assumptions of pre-given coherence or identity of the sense of localness that is produced. Instead, it is argued that places should be thought of as constructed within those moments of encounter, and thus based on our negotiations of the shifting interrelations between objects within the throwntogetherness (Amin & Thrift, 2002; Massey, 2005; Urry, 2000). Massey in particular emphasises this unfixed nature when she argues, “‘here’ is no more (and no less) than our encounter and what is made of it. It is, irretrievably, here and now. It won’t be the same ‘here’ when it is no longer now” (2005, p. 139 emphasis in original). Massey does not discount that our memories of previous moments of here will not shape current encounters. Instead, as also emphasised by Urry, these memories of then and there become yet another trajectory to be negotiated in the here and now (Massey, 2005).

This thesis agrees with the emphasis on the temporal and material that is bound up within these conceptions of space and place, and the manner in which it embeds the construction of place-based meanings, and thus place-based belonging, within the subjective experience of the individual. In particular I argue such a perspective offers a less value-laden alternative to theories gentrification, through which to explore issues of consumption practices and place-identifications within a gentrifying inner city neighbourhood. This is because the term gentrification retains strong associations to issues such as class-based changed and displacement – issues that have been noted as being conducive to fraught political and discursive projection (Davidson, 2011; Maloutas, 2011). This is despite a recognition of the definitional problems raised by the increasing diversity and complexity of the
processes of urban change that can be subsumed under this term (e.g., R. Atkinson, 2003b; Butler, 2007; Davidson, 2011; Lees, 2000; Lees, et al., 2008; Smith & Butler, 2007), the continuing fragmentation of the gentrifying middle classes (e.g., Bridge & Dowling, 2001; Butler & Robson, 2001, 2003), as well as general acceptance of the broader ways in which consumption practices are inextricably intertwined with our experiences of both the city, and contemporary society in general (e.g., Bauman, 2007; Miles & Miles, 2004; Urry, 1995). Thus whilst this thesis does not seek to deny that processes of gentrification can be have negative impacts on people’s abilities to remain within or feel connected to place, it also seeks to avoid projecting outcomes onto the specific context and methodology, which are described in detail in chapters three and four. Instead this thesis draws on broader theories of the throwntogetherness of the contemporary city, and the manner in which this may shape belonging, to develop a framework that looks beyond issues of gentrification, to consider the ways people construct identifications through consumption practices within the shifting environment that is the contemporary city.

However, conceptualising place as unfixed, and as constructed through our thoroughly subjective negotiations of the throwntogetherness, also raises questions as to how such a perspective can be applied through research. That is, if we situate the encounter as the basis of the constitution of place as here, and recognise that these encounters arise through the negotiation of multiple trajectories, some human, others physical or symbolic, others hidden or so banal that they are often overlooked; then what does this mean for how we understand place-based community? According to Massey, what this means is that we must face the challenge of negotiating this multiplicity – a challenge that is not posed by theory, but by place itself:

… places as presented here in a sense necessitate invention; they pose a challenge. They implicate us, perforce, in the lives of human others, and in our relations with non-humans they ask how we shall respond to our temporary meeting-up with these particular rocks and stones and trees. They require that, in one way or another, we confront the challenge of the negotiation of multiplicity (2005, p.141).
As discussed above, geographers and sociologists have argued that greater attention to the non-human and the immaterial represents one means through which to begin to approach this challenge (e.g., Amin & Thrift, 2002; Savage, et al., 2005; Urry, 2000). Others have added that everyday lived experiences within the ordinary and in-between spaces of cities offers a useful lens through which to focus such an exploration (Amin, 2008; Watson, 2006). In its own way this thesis aims to bring these elements together through an in-depth exploration of the lived experience of one individual, the author, which follows my experiences of negotiating the multiplicity of my new neighbourhood, and my attempts to develop a community connection to it.

To do so, the research focuses on everyday experiences within public and quasi-public spaces as moments of negotiation of all of these trajectories, but seeks to do so by focusing specifically on the role of imagination in this process. This thesis suggests that imagining is a significant component of the moment of negotiation, and that exploring the ways we as individuals use it to make sense of this coming together can make a valuable contribution to our understanding of experiences of place and belonging. To elaborate on this position, the following section explores theories regarding the relationship between imagination and community, including Benedict Anderson’s (2006) concept of nations as imagined communities, and as well as Urry’s (2000) construct of the imagined presence. This section also draws on theories of the productive and reproductive imagination and their relation to fiction, fantasy, and reflexivity (Ricoeur, 1994), to more closely consider what it might mean to imagine community. Finally this section discusses the role of objects and shared actions within this process, and the manner in which they may become receptacles of the imagined presence, or projection, of community.

**Community and the Imagination**

The concept of imagined community was introduced by Benedict Anderson in his 1983 publication *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (2006). As the title suggests, Anderson’s primary concern was nationalism. The idea of imagined community was invoked to describe how nation
states are able to present a collective culture and identity, despite the fact that the univer-
sality of shared value, and the possibility for social relations with all community members was not possible in such contexts. According to Anderson, the imagining process allows community members to overlook discrepancies in an individual’s interpretation and use of the symbols of the community, and also in the ways individual members experience the values that are said to define it. This works because imagination is stereoscopic; it discerns patterns in unrelated impressions, whilst holding contradictory aspects steady (Brann, 1991). Anderson describes this using the concept of simultaneity, proposing that simultaneous actions or the objects that represent them are used to make these connections across time and space. In doing so he pre-empts the emphasis on the significance of non-human relations outlined above. But what is most important, at this point, is the recognition that these simultaneous actions or experiences support the imaginative aggregation of difference that enables diverse groups of people to identify as community.

However, in the original edition of Imagined Communities, Anderson does not specifically define what he means by the term imagined. In an afterword to the 2006 edition he notes that he intended to convey something “neither ‘imaginary’ as in ‘unicorn’, nor matter-of-factly ‘real’ as in ‘TV set’, but rather something analogous to Madame Bovary and Queequeg, whose existence stemmed only from the moment Flaubert and Melville imagined them for us” (Benedict Anderson, 2006, p. 227). In this thesis I propose that this ‘something that is neither imaginary nor real’ can be usefully explored through the broader theories of processes of the imagination, and its relation to reflexive and fantastical constructions of community.

In particular this thesis draws on Ricoeur’s (1994) distinction between the reproductive and the productive imagination, and the relation of the latter to the critical and fascinated consciousness. According to Ricoeur, the distinction between the productive and the reproductive imagination is the absence or presence of the subject of the imagining. Thus imagining that generates an image of an absent subject is deemed reproductive because the image is merely a trace of the real, such as imagining an absent friend’s face. Whereas, imagining as fiction or fantasy is deemed productive because it creates a presence that is not real, but that is
experienced as if it is so. According to this conceptualisation of imagining, when we imagine community we generate a presence that feels real, but is a fiction.

Ricoeur also describes the processes of the imagination according to whether or not the subject is capable of assuming a critical awareness of the difference between the imaginary and the real (1994). He terms these the critical or fascinated consciousness, which refers to the difference between imagining as reflexivity, and as fantasy or delusion. The fascinated consciousness is less able to recognise the role of the imagination in the creation of the fiction than the critical consciousness, which reflexively draws on those imaginings to critique reality. These descriptions of imaginative processes thus hinge on the degree of belief that is involved, such that if one believes in the fictional product of the imagination to the extent they lose sight of its fictional nature, they may said to be deluded by one possessing a critical self-awareness. Returning to the process of imagining community, this suggests that it may not only be a fiction created by the productive imagination, but at its most utopian or idealised, may also stray into the realms of fantasy if the imaginer believes their utopian visions as reality. The following sections further explore these relations between imagination, fiction, and reflexivity, to consider the ways they may shape our imaginings of community.

The fiction of community

As noted in the introduction to this section, community has long been associated with utopian visions of a perfect society. It is the power of this fantasy that underlies critiques of community as an idealised paradise lost, and thus as a fiction that is ultimately unachievable (e.g., Bauman, 2001; Nancy, 1991; Young, 1986). According to Bauman, this is because our ideals of community cannot match our experiences of it:

the hope of respite and tranquillity which makes the community of their dreams so enticing will be dashed each time they declare, or are told, that the communal home that they have sought has been found. … The ‘really existing community’ will be unlike their dreams – more like their opposite: it will add to their fears and insecurity instead of quashing them or putting them to rest. It will call for
twenty-four hours a day vigilance and a daily resharpening of swords; for struggle, day in day out, to keep the aliens off the gates and to spy out and hunt down the turncoats in their own midst (2001, p. 17).

For all Bauman’s witty cynicism, he makes an important point regarding the relationship between imagination and community, emphasising that community’s ability to fascinate is essentially dependent on its inability to live up to its promise. That is, no matter how much we try to believe in the fiction, we are unable to maintain this fascination in the face of the critical reality of our experiences. Instead what we experience within “really existing community” is a tension between security and freedom, and ultimately community and individualism. This is because the really existing community seemingly demands that freedom be sacrificed in exchange for security, a price that is “inoffensive or even invisible only as long as the community stays in the dream” (Bauman, 2001, p. 4).

What Bauman also reminds us, in his colourful references to warm circles and battles against fear and insecurity, is the extent to which our fictions of community are embedded with emotion – with desire, hope, fear, worry, loneliness – all apparently “conjured up by an imagination whipped up by daily perpetual insecurity” (2001, p.15). This is possible because, as noted above, the productive imagination creates an image or a presence that feels real, despite its fictional nature. Thus we can argue that the emotions that become attached to achieving community (or failing to) are as much an element of the imagining of community as the sought after experience of belonging itself.

It is not my intention (nor Bauman’s, I believe) to suggest that the desire for community is delusional, but instead to highlight the extent to which the fictional imagining of community is a fundamental aspect of its construction. Instead, as Brann suggests in the quote below, this emotionally-laden fictional creation can be said to work as a transparency or projection (Bauman would perhaps add ‘rose-coloured glasses’?) that colours our perceptions of what is ‘really existing’:

… our world appears to us as an appearance, as a visible façade that both hides and reveals depths. It is by reason of this fact of life that the dreaming, fantasising, remembering imagination, the imagination in all its modes, can cooperate in the cognitive venture and take part
in it twice over: First it represents the appearances, clarified, within its own space; it absorbs them, beautified into its own visions; it projects them back as rectifying transparencies upon the world. And then it proceeds to captivate thought, inciting it to pierce these imaginative panoramas and to transcend them in search of their unseen core (1991, p. 786 emphasis in original).

That is, our productive imaginings of community work with our cognitive processes, to construct a fiction that is saturated with emotions, and that is used to colour, beautify, and also yet also critique our realities. It is in this way that the shared values and identities of a community of people, whom we cannot possibly actually know, are still able to capture our affections, loyalties, and generate a sense of belonging, even when we recognise the impossibility of that community. As will be discussed in a later section, the manner in which we project these visions onto people, objects, or experiences, plays an important role in the construction of imagined community. Firstly, however, as Brann implies in the quote above, we are also able to use our imaginings to search the “unseen core” of these projections. It is this use of the imagination to obtain a critical distance that is implied in the relation between fascinated and critical consciousness, as outlined earlier. The following section considers the manner in which this reflexivity may shape the imagining of community.

Community and reflexive imagining

As noted above, theories of imagination that assume a critical consciousness rely on an ability to distinguish between the imaginary and the real (Ricoeur, 1994). In these imagining processes, the product of the imagination is used to critically reflect on reality, rather than mask or colour it as fantasy is want to do. This relationship between imagination and reflexivity has also been proposed as an important element of socialisation, and is thus relevant to consider in relation to the manner in which we construct community. This section outlines theories on the relation between this reflexive use of the imagination, and the ultimate imagined community, society; then it considers the implications for the type of community that is investigated here.
The relationship between the imagination and reflexivity suggests that even when within the midst of productively imagining fictions, one is able to maintain a critical distance from all encompassing fantasy. This is what Brann is suggesting when she describes imagination’s cooperation with cognition. This process has also been explored in relation to behaviour and identity, both in relation to the self, and to that of the collective. In her work on imagining and the self, Hanson draws on Mead’s work on the vocal gesture to propose it is instead the imagination that underlies reflexivity (1986). Adopting Wittgenstein’s (1947-1949) terminology, she describes this as a process of seeing ... as, suggesting that we are able to use the imagination to see oneself as an object, as another would, and thus assume the subjectivity of the other. According to Hanson, habits play a key role in this process, because they are a public expression of action that can be used to see … as. That is our habits, and the manner in which we react to their public expression by others, become a way of becoming more aware of the self. In doing so however, we draw on an anonymous they, as a generalised perspective on values or modes of behaviour against which to benchmark that imagining (Hanson, 1986). That is, we draw on the (imagined) shared values of a specific community as they are expressed through habits or norms, to make assessments of our own behaviours (or imaginings).

Conversely, however, whilst imagining the other may be used to affirm self-identity, it has also been argued that this collective imagining underpins the construction of the symbols and norms through which the individual is defined. Castoriadis (1994) refers to this as the social instituting imaginary, the self-created society that is constituted by the elements it creates. As with Anderson’s imagined community, this relies on interplay between a collective culture that is manifest in an anonymous they, yet is also symbolically reinforced through the imaginings of its individual members. In a similar exploration of society as a social imaginary, Taylor argues that we retain an awareness of its constructed nature (2004). Indeed he suggests that the moral order of such imaginaries is only able to be maintained because they allow (and require) the recognition of belonging to a collective agency, as well as an individual ability to objectively categorise that collective as set of normative processes. Returning to the imagining of community, what this suggests then is that we are able to reflexively evaluate our individual fictions of community against the really existing community that manifests as the anonymous they. Furthermore, in
doing so, we are not only able to see ourselves as belonging to that anonymous other, but also recognise the constructed nature of the symbols, norms, and habits through which that other is projected.

The social imaginaries discussed by Castoriadis, Taylor and Anderson are all conceived at the national or societal level. However the reflexive imagining of community can also be seen at a smaller scale in the work of Maffesoli (1996), and much of the research on consumer communities that his theories have encouraged (e.g., Cova, 1997; Cova, Kozinets, & Shankar, 2007; Kozinets, 2002). In contrast to the sense of desperation and insecurity that Bauman in particular likes to imbue contemporary community with, these researchers allow for a more active engagement in the fiction of community. In particular, and as per Taylor above, consumer researchers argue that consumers exert agency and act out identity roles in a manner that is intricately intertwined with and mediated by a range of physical, social, and historical contexts that form the social imaginary (Arnould & Thompson, 2007; Featherstone, 1991; Firat & Dholakia, 1998; Holt, 2002). In doing so, consumers also co-create value (Vargo & Lusch, 2004), that is subjectively determined and meaningfully identity defining (Holbrook, 1999), and yet also reinforces the constructs of consumer society as a social imaginary (Bauman, 2007). This relation between consumption practices, the value-based individual and the collective identification they can offer underlies the thesis’ focus on consumption practices and the spaces that frame as objects and actions able to support the imagining of community. This will be discussed in more detail in the following sections.

What is important at this stage, however, is the recognition of an interrelation between the role of individual and collective imagination in constructing and maintaining the collective, which through its norms and symbols, also works as the benchmark against which the members of that society come to see themselves as individual. More broadly, these theories also remind us that whilst our imaginings of community may be fictional, and prone to idealistic fantasy at times, these fantasies themselves play a role in the construction of the social imaginary against which they are evaluated. And whilst some authors may argue this sets our dreams of community up for constant disappointment, others suggest that our awareness of the
Construction instead allows us to more fully appreciate the ephemeral nature of the experience of belonging. Finally, although these collective identifications rely on imagined shared values, the sheer fact that these are imagined means they also allow space for individual differentiation. Thus whether or not one believes that imagined community can offer a sufficiently real experience of belonging, it could be argued it is successful precisely because we willingly suspend our disbelief as we oscillate between an emotionally present fiction of belonging and a reflexive recognition of its fleeting and constructed nature. The following section continues this exploration of the relationship between community and imagination to specifically consider the facilitating role of objects and actions, and the imagined presence they may project.

The imagined presence of community

Beyond reinforcing the idealised nature of our contemporary constructions of national communities, Benedict Anderson’s concept of imagined community also foregrounds the role of objects and shared experiences in our imaginings of connections between people and things we will never experience. In his discussion of simultaneous actions, Anderson uses the example of the newspaper, and print capitalism more generally, which is able to create links between different places and events by bringing them together under one masthead, title, or specific day. This works to create a temporal relation – not only between those events, but also between the readers, who by virtue of the shared practice of consuming that newspaper become tangible evidence of that link.

As discussed above, the feeling that this is a shared experience can be said to be a product of the imagination that is projected on to the scene. At the same time however, as is argued by Taylor and researchers on consumer communities, the newspaper reader is reflexively aware that this experience of belonging or identification is a construction. Anderson captures the experience of this dual process here:

… the newspaper reader is well aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands, and is continually reassured that the imagined world is visibly rooted in everyday life.
... fiction seeps quietly and continuously into reality, creating that remarkable confidence of community in anonymity (2006, pp. 35-36).

A feeling of confidence of community in anonymity is a long way from Bauman’s picture of insecure individuals desperately searching for a warm circle of belonging, although as the previous sections have highlighted this thesis recognises that both experiences play an important role in driving our desire for community. The concern of this section is to explore the manner in which these objects and actions are able to offer that reassurance or enticement.

The relationship between symbols and community has been well established within research, most specifically by Cohen who argued for the importance of symbols and symbolic practices in the affirmation of community membership and boundaries (1985). Like Anderson, Cohen suggests that the meaning of these symbols is open to interpretation, and that even amongst community members the understanding and use of these symbols will vary. One of the key advantages of this kind of theorisation is that it recognises community as an open system of cultural codification, and allows for interpretation and shifts in the meaning of these symbols over time (Delanty, 2003). That is, such communities may evolve as society itself changes, and yet still appear to be stable.

Within research on consumer communities we can see evidence of the symbolic use of objects to support an experience of community. These affective communities have been recorded as forming around products or experiences ranging from the iconic to the banal, including the hazelnut spread Nutella, Jeep and Saab cars, Inline skating and Apple Macintosh computers (e.g., Cova & Cova, 2001; Cova & Pace, 2006; McAlexander, Schouten, & Koenig, 2002; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). In each case, the identity-defining value that is extracted through using these products and sharing consumption experiences works to reinforce both an individual and a collective identity (Cova, 1997; Cova, et al., 2007). This works because “the link is more important than the thing” (Cova, 1997, p. 307). That is, whilst the object, action, or brand may operate as the physical or symbolic manifestation of the community, it is the experience of belonging or connection it engenders that gives that object its presence and power.
Importantly, such communities are fluid by their nature, and thus stretch Cohen’s notion of common ways of behaving based on imprecise interpretations of symbols. They also offer a clear relation between the theoretical discussions of community formation offered by Anderson and Cohen, and our practical experiences of interacting with people and objects through the medium of our consumption practices. In this thesis I also argue that these fluid conceptualisations of belonging offer a useful basis from which to consider the nature of place-based communities within the kinds of throwntogether conceptualisations of place discussed above. In particular, Cova’s theorisation of the link reflects a similar emphasis on the potential of objects proposed by Urry in his concept of the imagined presence of community.

This connection is relevant because, as noted in the discussion on recent conceptualisations of space and place, our interactions with objects are increasingly emphasised as an important component of the ways we construct moments of place. According to Urry (2000), objects are significant because they can carry memory traces that stimulate and structure people’s imaginings. In Massey’s language, this could be described as the then and there of earlier negotiations that are projected into the here and now (2005). These objects may range from monumental buildings, landscapes, institutionalised symbols and media images, to more ordinary objects or experiences, like trees or pathways. It is for this reason that national communities can be constructed around printed words, pictures, or particular monuments, or global brand communities by the images of advertising, or through the diffuse use of products. Importantly however it is the presence or value that is (imagined to be) embedded within the object, rather than the object itself, that is able to construct the community, a presence that is able to be projected across its members regardless of whether or not they are conscious of it (Urry, 2000).

With the terminology of the imagined presence, Urry perhaps most clearly captures the essence of the link and the power of the simultaneous action described by Cova and Anderson, in that it is experienced as being present and yet is also imagined. It is the construction and experience of the imagined presence that is of interest to this thesis. Returning to the discussion of imagination above, the relation between the imagined presence and objects also reinforces the importance of the productive imagination in this process, and suggests the involvement of both the fascinated and
critical consciousness. Furthermore, as Brann reminds us, these imaginative projections can also inject emotion, collapse time and differences, and induce fantasy. That is, there is no guarantee that our imagined scenarios will lead us to ‘real’ conclusions, despite the guidance that the collective imaginary provides. It is this fuzzy world of imaginative projection and the way that it relates to imagined community that this thesis explores; the lived experience of the interplay between the individual and collective imagination within the context of neighbourhood-based community.

**Imagining neighbourhood-based community within the throwntogetherness**

The previous sections of this literature review have provided an overview of theories of community, and considered how they may be related to contemporary perspectives on space and place. Through this overview I have also considered the processes of the imagination and its relation to the construction of community, in particular exploring the relation between fantasy and reflexivity, and the construction of community through objects and shared practices. This thesis applies this framework to the context of the key modern social imaginary, consumer society, and the site in which this is most commonly manifest, the city, by emplacing this investigation of imagining community within the public and quasi-public spaces of an inner city neighbourhood.

As discussed above, the city is a space where place-based meanings cannot be seen to be fixed, and are instead better understood as events of place, based on the ever shifting interrelations between the trajectories of people and things. This perspective emphasises the role of symbols and objects in this process, such that the experience of belonging to community is not just born of a social encounter, but can also be projected as an imagined presence by buildings, trees, rocks, parks, traffic, familiar street corners and so on. This thesis argues this is significant with regard to considering the manner in which imagined neighbourhood-based community is constructed because when we consider non-human elements, we introduce varying temporalities and allow for their potential to communicate an imagined presence across space and time.
This thesis proposes then that emplaced moments of encounter that arise through our
negotiations of the multiplicity of the contemporary urban environment may also be
experienced as moments of imagined community. That is, that the experiences
generated in the negotiation of the coming together of the trajectories of people and
things can become the basis of an imagined presence that is experienced here and
now, but may also be projected into the future and the past. One of the key questions
of the thesis then is how an individual’s imaginative processes work to construct
such an experience of neighbourhood-based community. As outlined above, objects
clearly play an important role, as do our movements through neighbourhood public
and quasi-public spaces, and the habitual practices that we develop in relation to
them. It is the manner in which the individual constructs the presence of imagined
community out of these experiences that is the focus of this thesis.

The aim of the first half of the literature review, then, has been to establish an
understanding of place and community that can be usefully applied to a dynamic
inner city neighbourhood, and provide a framework through which to consider the
ways experiences in its public and quasi-public spaces may come to be imagined to
be experiences of community. In the remainder of this overview I explore research
on consumption practices, and public and quasi-public spaces, and the manner in
which they may support collective identification, and provide symbols for the
imagining of community. These are the spaces in which much of our lived
experience of neighbourhood is emplaced, and they thus present as valuable
resources for our imaginative processes.

Cities, Unfixed Place and Consumption

This thesis is specifically interested in the potential for neighbourhood-based
community within an Australian inner city suburb undergoing change through
genrification. As noted above, such spaces may be viewed being structured by a
process of class-based change, leading to displacement and a reshaping of place
identity. However they may also be viewed as spaces where multiple trajectories,
moving at different speeds of time, come together within a small geographic area to
construct certain kinds of situated multiplicity. In the gentrifying suburbs of
Australian cities these may include cosmopolitan and technologically savvy fragments of the middle class, the broad acceptance of consumption-based socialising and lifestyle practices, increases in arts and cultural industries, as well as cafes and bars, flexible or non-traditional employment, an appreciation of diversity, property investment and speculation, place-making and marketing activities, government supported residential densification, socio-economic and demographic shifts in the population, changes in use of historical buildings, and so on. Furthermore, in such spaces, these trajectories may appear to be constructing change at an instantaneous rather than glacial pace, with consequences for our abilities to construct place-based identifications within those shifting contexts.

More specifically, gentrifying areas are also spaces where cultures of consumption are intricately intertwined with our experiences of public space and neighbourhood identity. Through processes that have been described as diversification and standardisation, gentrifiers have been credited with using their consumption preferences in ways that make the inner city safer and more interesting for the broader middle class (Ley, 1996; Zukin, 1998). These consumer preferences have been linked with the expansion of cultural and lifestyle offerings in inner city areas, such as restaurants, bars, and galleries (e.g., Butler & Robson, 2003; Lloyd, 2006; Zukin, 1995, 2010). However this process has also been described as the commodification of the neighbourhood aspects that made it initially appealing (e.g., Crawford, 1992; Lloyd, 2006; Zukin, 1982, 1998, 2010). That is, we cannot discount the role of consumption practices when considering the relationship between the public spaces of the city, and our experiences of identification and belonging within it, nor in shaping society itself (Bauman, 2007; Miles & Miles, 2004; Urry, 1995).

Furthermore, the consumption-based lifestyles that gentrifying contexts both support and encourage can also mean that consumption practices may be a key reason that people are moving through public space, or at least structure many of their relations with those spaces. That is, consumption practices and spaces may provide a purpose for which – and spatial frame against which – our everyday interactions with people and objects are undertaken within such neighbourhoods. This influence is of interest to this thesis because, as will be discussed in more detail below, consumption spaces have an established popular and theoretical association with individual and collective
identity definition (e.g., Oldenburg, 1999; Sherry, 1998b). This is a process that has been shown to draw on interaction, physical and symbolic resources, and affective responses, and thus reflects the focus on non-human elements, which was argued above.

Research in marketing and consumer behaviour describes this identity definition as the product of a co-creative process, where producers and consumers come together to create value that extends beyond the use of a product or service (Holbrook, 1999; Vargo & Lusch, 2004). That is, our consumption practices generate experiences whose meaning is both subjective and able to be shared (Caru & Cova, 2007). This thesis argues these moments of value creation through consumption practices can also be viewed as moments of negotiation of trajectories where, for example, product preferences, the physical elements of a consumption space, and the social mix of the crowd are all negotiated in a moment of purchase and use that constructs identity-defining meaning. Thus as we move in and through the different public and quasi-public spaces of a neighbourhood we may not only consume their amenities and appropriate their spaces for social purposes, but also construct their identities, and the subsequent value they offer to us and others.

This thesis focuses on these moments of negotiation within public and quasi-public spaces to consider the manner in which they contribute to the imagining of community. To do so the following section draws on literature from consumer research, sociology, and geography on the manner in which the physical, social, and symbolic elements of such spaces may shape collective experience in contemporary inner city. However, this interdisciplinary focus also introduces a range of terminology in reference to these spaces, with marketing in particular using the term servicescape. These variations also relate to the degree of publicness of the space, where spaces such as streets and parks may be considered public, whilst cafes or shopping centres quasi-public. However, as urban theory in particular has argued, even within public space the levels of publicness can vary significantly (see Neal, 2009 for an overview). For this reason this thesis mostly uses the terms public and quasi-public to refer to these spaces in general, and consumption space or servicescape when specifically referring to or drawing on marketing theory (as in chapter five).
The following sections provide an outline of research that has explored the potential of public and quasi-public spaces as sites of gathering and identification, in order to consider how this can inform an investigation of the manner in which they may support the imagining of neighbourhood-based community. Rather than delve into the long history of research on public space, this section specifically considers that which has explored its role in collective identification according to the openness of the space. To do so I draw on the terminology of anchoring and exposure places proposed by Aubert-Gamet and Cova with specific reference to the manner in which consumption spaces could support postmodern communities – those termed affective above (1999). Anchoring sites are those closed spaces that support established communities. These sites are familiar in research and popular culture, as the locals’ pub, the regular’s cafe, or the member’s club. More open spaces were termed exposure sites. These are locations that allow a diverse range of people to mix with limited risk, and offer opportunities for different groups of people to be exposed to each other’s identification practices. This thesis suggests this exposure role also encapsulates the kind of tacit collective experience that Amin proposes can be generated within the situated multiplicity of crowded, diverse, incomplete, improvised and disorderly public spaces (2008). Thus exposure sites may be a collection of consumption spaces such as in a shopping centre or open-air market, as well as streets, parks, beaches, or any other kind of public space that is able to positively support what has been termed low-level or light touch sociality (e.g., Watson, 2006).

Drawing on the work of Lofland (1998), this thesis refers to such locations as realms, rather than sites, or places. Whilst Lofland uses the term realm to specifically refer to public space social interaction, as a means of emphasising its fluidity, the thesis adopts it in a manner that also recognises the fluidity of the physical, discursive, and symbolic. This distinction aims to emphasise that whilst public and quasi-public spaces contain physical elements that can be read as symbolic of community, the activation of this presence is dependent on our negotiations of those varying trajectories. Thus a space may offer anchoring, because it supports established communities coming together to reinforce their connections; however, this anchoring is not solely a function of the physical location, but is also dependent on the nature of the relations occurring within it.
This thesis defines anchoring and exposure realms, then, as moments in time and space, where physical, social, and symbolic elements come together in ways that may be imagined to be an experience of community. Returning to the notion of place as an encounter, introduced above, it is possible to suggest then that experiences of anchoring and exposure are different manifestations of that encounter, with different implications for type of community that is experienced. The following sections provide an overview of research on these different types of open and closed public and quasi-public spaces to consider how they may support the imagining of community, beginning with those I have categorised as anchoring realms.

Public and quasi-public spaces as anchoring realms
The potential of consumption spaces to operate as contained sites of collective gathering and identification has long been recognised in theory and popular culture – as the London coffee houses of the 1700s, or the corner pub or cafe of television soap operas and situation comedies. In this form they have been referred to as a third place, and have been championed as “the core settings of informal public life”, (Oldenburg, 1999, p. 16), because they allow for an experience of communal gathering that is inclusive and sociable, and yet also not bound by the commitments of primary relations. However, as the research discussed below demonstrates, this is an idealistic perspective of such spaces, which may instead operate as more exclusionary parochial realms (Lofland, 1998). This section provides an overview of this work and considers the relation between anchoring realms and the concepts of imagining community discussed above.

Sociological research on consumption spaces operating as anchoring realms has tended to focus on the activities and identification practices of the people who gather within them. Celebrated ethnographic examples include Elijah Anderson’s study of Jelly’s bar and bottle shop (1978), Spradley and Mann’s work within Brady’s bar (1975), Duneier’s focus on the men of Slim’s Table (1992) and Katovich and Reese’s study of regular identities at the Big Derby lounge (1987). These authors all describe these as spaces in which parochial group identifications and broader cultural roles are continually renegotiated and reinforced through social interaction. Consumer research has similarly demonstrated that staff and other customers within
regularly patronised spaces can also provide companionship and social support, for people who are experiencing loneliness due to bereavement or illness, or more generally as commercial friendships (Price & Arnould, 1999; Rosenbaum, 2006, 2007).

Although not generally the focus of the research, the ways that physical and symbolic elements of the consumption spaces, such as different seating areas, are utilised within these identification process is also acknowledged. Elijah Anderson, for example, describes the ways that interactions between the different groups of men alter according to their locations – in Jelly’s bottle shop, or in the park across the road. Similarly, Spradley and Mann emphasise the ways that different parts of Brady’s bar communicate information about patrons. Regulars and friends of the owners crowd around the horseshoe bar, couples gather in the upstairs space for privacy, waitresses struggle to maintain their autonomy over the serving area that is supposed to be their domain. In the Big Derby lounge, the control of different areas and elements of the bar, such as what television channel is on, are demonstrated to be important markers of regular identities. What this range of work most clearly reinforces however is the important role that a specific consumption space can play as a space in which groups of people can gather, and the complex systems of social relations that develop within those situated groups.

However, the importance of physical and symbolic elements as tools used to reinforce those collective identifications has been extensively explored within marketing and servicescape research. These disciplines tend to focus less on group interaction practices, and more on the manner in which the physical and symbolic elements of the space shape consumers’ experiences (e.g., Price & Arnould, 1999; Rosenbaum, 2005; Sherry, 1998c). From a marketing perspective, servicescapes are key sites in which producers and consumers come together to offer and exchange value. As spaces they have the potential to introduce a range of physical, social and symbolic resources from which a consumer can draw to add value to their consumption experience (Bitner, 1992; Sherry, 1998b). This has led to studies that have investigated the ways the specific physical elements of these spaces affect the consumption experience, such as the impact of the colour of walls, or the type of music played (see Rosenbaum & Massiah, 2011 for an overview). The discipline
also includes research on how consumption space design elements can reinforce existing connections to social and aesthetic communities, reinforcing the arguments above regarding the importance of objects and symbols in community definition. This can range from the use of rainbow flags and pictures of gay and lesbian icons in bars and cafes to communicate support for (and a desire for patronage from) the gay and lesbian community (e.g., Lugosi, 2009; Rosenbaum, 2005), through to the brand community anchoring realms of the experiential product-laden environment of the stores such as NikeTown and ESPN Zone (e.g., Sherry, 1998a; Sherry et al., 2001).

Marketing research has described the impact of these elements as influencing an individual’s affective and cognitive approach/avoidance responses, and ultimately their repurchase intention (Bitner, 1992; Donovan, Rossiter, Marcoolyn, & Nesdale, 1994). That is, our negotiations of the physical, social and symbolic elements of a servicescape can generate responses that can include a greater willingness to interact and an increase in the time spent in the location, as well as a greater willingness to return (Donovan, et al., 1994). Our responses to social elements in particular have also been shown to have a contagious nature. This has been referred to as emotional contagion (Pugh, 2001), and describes when an emotion spreads across customers and imbues a location with a specific atmosphere. Research on affect suggests that such an atmosphere may both surround an individual or scene, and emanate from it, reflecting a quality that is generally attributed to feeling (Ben Anderson, 2009).

What this implies, then, is that an individual’s response to their negotiations of the range of elements that shape the consumption experience may both directly and indirectly affect the experiences of others. This may occur directly, such as where a positive experience increases one’s own willingness to interact, or indirectly, by contributing to a more intangible experience of an affective atmosphere. Whilst direct emotional experiences are likely to be localisable within an specific object or action, the source of an affective atmosphere may be more difficult to pinpoint, suggesting the potential for attribution to a presence, or collective. This thesis suggests that this kind of affective atmosphere may also be reflective of the emotion that is imbued within the imagined presence through the desire for belonging, and thus, conversely also operate as a cue for its imagining.
Of course not all our experiences within consumption spaces are positive, and negative experiences may also be contagious leaving individuals feeling excluded or out of place. Furthermore, when operating as anchoring realms for specific cultural or customer groups, such spaces can also become exclusionary, limiting the easy sociality to those accepted as community members. Lofland (1998) in particular questions the openness of the third place, suggesting such sites operate as parochial realms, as they have been privatised to some extent by the behaviours of the groups within them. These sites can be somewhat restrictive to outsiders, as illustrated by Katovich and Reese (1987) in their description of the turf protection behaviours that spatially segregated different types of users within the Big Derby lounge, as well as by Anderson (1978) in Jelly’s and Spradley and Mann (1975) in Brady’s, reinforcing that experiences of exclusion are as much a potential outcome of our negotiation of the elements of a consumption space as those of belonging. This recognition of the exclusionary potential reflects broader arguments on the manner in which public spaces can be regulated or constrained (e.g., R. Atkinson, 2003a; L. H. Lofland, 1998; Zukin, 1998). More significantly for this thesis, these descriptions of turf protection behaviours reinforce the importance of boundaries in community definition. At the same time, however, I suggest that it also highlights the fluidity of those boundaries, and the manner in which exclusion and belonging may often be intertwined and contingent upon the specific coming together of objects at that time.

When considered in a neighbourhood context, such anchoring practices may also encourage the social tectonics that Butler and Robson have identified in some gentrifying London suburbs (2001, 2003). They use this term to describe the rubbing against nature of interaction in neighbourhoods where the diversity of consumption spaces allow different cultural groups to co-exist within shared space without really mixing. In such contexts experiencing difference can become eating in an ethnic restaurant, or shopping in a delicatessen, rather than actually engaging with the other. Of course this also suggests that these different cultural groups may feel able to anchor within specific locations in their neighbourhood, which may have positive implications for the manner in which they are able to integrate that place identity, and thus support the development of elective belonging (Savage, et al., 2005). It also reinforces the fluidity of these constructions of belonging, as individuals or social groups are able to use a range of different consumption spaces to support their
identity construction, or allow themselves to be exposed to the identification practices of others. Finally I suggest it also highlights the importance of the relationship between anchoring and exposure realms. The latter are discussed in more detail in the following section.

This section has provided a background on research from urban studies, sociology and marketing on spaces that can be said to be operating as anchoring realms. Research has recorded that these sites can play an important part in supporting experiences of belonging to specific social or cultural groups. These identity-defining experiences draw extensively on the social interaction that occurs within these spaces, yet are also supported by their physical and symbolic elements. Furthermore, the emotional significance of these anchoring experiences not only extends to their potential to support collective identification, but also for their ability to contribute to an affective atmosphere, which this thesis suggests may be interpreted as the imagined presence of community.

However, this process is most effective at anchoring specific cultural groups or communities within consumption spaces that specifically target or support their shared identity, rather than support a broader place-based collective identity. This is because to include, such spaces necessarily also exclude. For this reason we also need to consider the ways public and quasi-public spaces may also offer opportunities for exposure to diverse groups of people in ways that support the imagining process. This potential is explored in the following section.

Public and quasi-public spaces as exposure realms
Whilst there has been extensive research regarding the manner in which consumption spaces may support established communities as anchoring realms, research on the potential of consumption spaces to support secondary interaction and identification as realms of exposure is more difficult to clearly categorise. This is because the conception of an exposure realm, where individuals are exposed to identification practices with limited risk, in many ways reflects broader ideals of public space as a site of civic culture. This section does not intend to delve into the long history of research on the civic associations of public space, and instead looks primarily to recent work on shopping centres and markets, which I argue more
closely reflect the idea expressed within Aubert-Gamet and Cova’s exposure realm concept. However, it also considers Amin’s conceptual work – on the potential of situated multiplicity in public spaces for supporting collective experience – for the insight this can offer into the manner in which exposure realms may be constructed.

Aubert-Gamet and Cova (1999) introduced the terminology of exposure place to describe open servicescapes that could support the construction of the link of community in contexts that posed limited risk. In these realms of exposure individuals are neither exactly at home, nor exactly in the home of others, however neither are they in a non-place. At the same time, however, Aubert-Gamet and Cova also imply that the postmodern model of the exposure place had not yet been invented in a reflection of the recognised potential of open public spaces to be regulated, exclusionary, and most often, dull (e.g., R. Atkinson, 2003a; Crawford, 1992; Sorokin, 1992; Zukin, 1995).

In this thesis, I suggest that the kind of spaces in which we can most easily recognise realms of exposure are those that are a collection of consumption spaces united into a larger coherent space by footpaths and passageways, such as shopping centres, hotels, and markets in streets, parks, or buildings. That is, these are spaces where a diverse consumption offering will attract a broader customer base than that of a small cafe, bar or retail store. Subsequently relational dominance is less likely to be limited to any one social group or type of secondary relation, as can occur within anchoring realms. However, this also implies that the meaning extracted through our negotiations of symbolic or behavioural cues may be more difficult to read, as well as less certain because it may be less ritualised, and the individuals within it may be more difficult to categorise (Hall, 2008). In that respect, the openness of such spaces raises questions as to the potential of these experiences to support collective identification that operates at a level above the specific space itself (which would be anchoring), yet below a more generalised affective or social experience that is not generative of a collective identity.

Evidence of the potential of exposure realms can be seen in research that has focused on our lived experiences of the ordinary and in-between spaces of the city (e.g., Watson, 2006, 2009; Wise, 2011). In this research we see recognition of the more mundane and habitualised ways that quasi-public, spaces such as markets and
shopping centres, can support collective culture. For example, whilst shopping centres have been criticised as superficial, hyperreal and as non-places (e.g., Auge, 1995; Langman, 1992), research has also described how they are appropriated by various groups for non-consumption uses. This includes as gathering sites for teenagers and the elderly, as well as for browsing and people watching (e.g., de Certeau, 1984; Sandikci & Holt, 1998; Wise, 2011). Research has also demonstrated that shopping centres can reinforce collective identifications and attachments and offer experiences of community (Sandikci & Holt, 1998; Staeheli & Mitchell, 2006). This includes representations of national identity, which may become particularly apparent when perceived to be threatened by changes such as refurbishment (Maclaran & Brown, 2005).

Wise in particular has argued that the types of mundane sharing of space that shopping centre food courts offer can assist in habituating difference in ways that engenders rubbing along relations, and can work to build tolerance between different ethnic groups (2011). Watson similarly describes light touch relations that offer a form of limited encounter where recognition of different others has the potential to mitigate against withdrawal into more established norms of public space behaviour (2006). For Wise, this is achieved not by disruptions, but instead through frequent low-level engagement, such as that of the service encounter, in spaces that she refers to as being low fragrance (2011). Amin refers to such processes as territorialisation and emplacement, arguing that our daily patterns of usage work to pattern and domesticate space, both spatially and temporally (2008). This spatial ordering can reduce (or tame) some of the threats associated with the openness of public space, and as Wise and Watson demonstrate may also positively support the construction of a realm of exposure.

Research on markets has similarly shown evidence of the potential of quasi-public spaces to operate as exposure realms by offering opportunities to carry out familiar shopping activities within diverse customer groups (e.g., McGrath, Sherry, & Heisley, 1993; Watson, 2006, 2009). These spaces are less domesticated than shopping centres, and are likely to introduce the potential for spontaneous disruptions or impositions, such as through buskers or temporary stallholders. Indeed, markets have been held up as the exemplar of positive public space sociality.
and as models for cosmopolitanism (e.g., Aubert-Gamet & Cova, 1999; Duruz, Luckman, & Bishop, 2011; Watson, 2009). Yet similarly to shopping centres, the commercial aspects of markets cannot be ignored. That is, whilst markets certainly offer greater opportunities for unconstrained exposure within their situated multiplicity, they are also regulated by processes of consumption, and the potential for homogenisation and commodification that this brings (Probyn, 2011).

Interestingly, authors researching markets consistently reinforce the importance of this consumption aspect, manifest as regular stalls and stallholders as anchors for the types of exposure they offer (e.g., McGrath, et al., 1993; Watson, 2009; Zukin, 2010). For regular market users they are a familiar space or face, and for non-regulars, they still provide an opportunity for interaction encased in a service encounter, or a subject upon which to base interaction with other customers. Watson describes them as the social glue that can provide a focal point for the community of users (2009). Wise similarly recognises the importance of regular staff and customers in habitualising difference in shopping centre food courts (2011). In this respect they play a similar role to the bar tenders and regular staff who are able to structure collective identification in anchoring realms (e.g., Katovich & Reese, 1987; Spradley & Mann, 1975). Whilst research on anchoring realms demonstrates that interactions with these familiar individuals can form the basis of commercial friendships and begin the process of anchoring (e.g., Price & Arnould, 1999; Rosenbaum, 2006, 2007), I suggest that on a more basic level these people may also reinforce familiarity and support domestication.

Whilst familiarity can support exposure through its contribution to an experience of security, Amin argues that this ordering also allows for an appreciation of the disruptions or surprises that continually emerge from the multiplicity (2008). This reflects Aubert-Gamet and Cova’s recommendations for supporting the development of such spaces, including introducing spontaneity and the potential for disruptions or subversion of intended use (1999). Such micro events, as Aubert-Gamet and Cova term them, would aim to reduce transparency, rationality and rigour from consumption spaces and practices, all of which they argue prevent individuals from coming together. Amin (2008) refers to these as disruptions and emergences as a means of activating the social ethos of the throwntogetherness. It also reflects a
broader focus on the potential of both everyday sociality and more performative expressions of identity, such as festivals and flash mobs, to support the collective engagement and cosmopolitanism that is evident in optimistic accounts of public space (e.g., Jacobs, 1961; Sherry, Kozinets, & Borghini, 2007; Stevens, 2007; Watson, 2006).

Of course it is this same type of secondary relating in public spaces that Butler and Robson (2001) describe as tectonic, and it must be acknowledged that even very open quasi-public spaces may still subtly segregate people according to their consumption preferences and cultural tastes. Thus we may see rubbing along of different cultural groups as they share space, but not necessarily identifications, or we may see, as Zukin (2010) fears, an aestheticisation of the other, where appreciation of difference becomes a form of cultural power wielded by one group over another. The potential of such public space tolerations to mask uneven power relations and perpetuate inequities is a key criticism that is raised in relation to more positive perspectives on these types of public space exposure (Valentine, 2008), and this thesis does not seek to deny that many of our experiences within public and quasi-public spaces can be regulated and exclusionary. At the same time, however, as per authors such as Amin (2008, 2010), Thrift (2005), Wise (2011), Oldenburg (1999) and of course Jacobs (1961), I am optimistic of the potential of public and quasi-public spaces to support anchoring and exposure realms.

Research on consumption spaces or precincts as sites of exposure is therefore mixed. In many ways it also reflects research on public space more generally, where the potential for conviviality, constraint, and celebration is shaped by the manner in which physical, social, and symbolic elements come together within that particular time and space. However, considering spaces such as shopping centres and markets as realms of exposure highlights their potential to support low-level interaction and engagement that can work to habitualise and domesticate difference, as well as disrupt those habitual patterns in ways that can work to construct fleeting connections. Yet such research does raise questions regarding the manner in which this kind of rubbing along can support the imagining of community, because as some researchers argue it can also breed a level of tolerance that is underpinned by unequal power relations.
Furthermore, the relation between exposure to difference and the shared practices or symbols of imagined community is not clear. Some potential is suggested in the recognition of the importance of familiar traders or locations as the social glue that acts as a focal point in market spaces, and I suggest may come to operate as symbols of the imagined presence. However the ability of that presence to be attributed to a specific community would be dependent upon the individual’s negotiations of the diffuse and potentially difficult to categorise trajectories that underlie the openness of exposure realms. In that respect, then, this thesis suggests that an important component of understanding how this exposure role may be applied is in recognising the throwntogether manner in which the link of exposure comes about, and emphasising the fluidity of the elements that construct it. Thus, whilst recognising that open public spaces may often be mundane or constrained, this thesis nonetheless argues that they can have an important influence on the ways that we imagine community. Exploring this influence is one of the aims of this thesis research.

Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed a range of theory on community, imagination, and public and quasi-public spaces to outline a framework for this thesis. As discussed, the research is concerned with the manner in which community is experienced within the gentrifying contemporary inner city. These are spaces where issues of class, consumption-based lifestyles, place identification and a desire for the belonging of community can all come together in ways that have been problematised within gentrification research. The thesis aims to look beyond this potentially value-laden rhetoric to explore the ways identities are constructed in these unstable environments.

To do so, the thesis draws on theories of space and mobilities that emphasise that place-based meanings are not fixed, and are instead better understood as constructed through our negotiations of the ever shifting interrelation between people and things. This is referred to by Massey as a throwntogetherness, and by Amin as situated multiplicity – concepts that this thesis argues offer a useful means of exploring how community is imagined within the shifting trajectories of a gentrifying inner city.
suburb. This is because these perspectives are based on a theoretical approach to the city that attempts to take into account the influence of the physical, social, and symbolic, and emphasises that affects and imagination play an important role in our construction of these experiences. In doing so these theories also emphasise that subjectivities are at the heart of constructing meaning within place, and it is these subjectivities that are the focus of this investigation of imagining community.

As a means through which to explore this complexity, the thesis focuses on the processes of the imagination and their relation to the construction of community. To do so it draws on Benedict Anderson’s theory of imagined community, Urry’s concept of the imagined presence, and Ricoeur’s description of the processes of the productive imagination. As this overview has described, imagined communities work because individuals use their productive imagination to embed meaning into objects or practices in ways that construct shared values and identities whilst overlooking differences. Whilst these imaginings can be prone to fantasy, as Bauman emphasises, the productive imagination also supports reflexivity and plays an important role in the construction of norms that structure an imagined community. This interplay between fantasy and reflexivity suggests an oscillation between a fiction of belonging to community and an awareness of its constructed nature. In this thesis I argue that this interplay can be usefully explored through the identity definition of consumption practices and the influence of the public and quasi-public spaces that frame them.

In his theory of imagined community, Anderson emphasises the role that simultaneous actions and objects play in the construction of community. This importance is reinforced by Cohen’s theories on the importance of symbols in the construction of community, and Cova’s research on the use of products as the things that constitute the link of consumer communities. The potential of the objects within the throwntogetherness is perhaps best captured in Urry’s concept of the imagined presence, through which he describes how objects, practices, and memory traces may come to symbolise the shared values, practices or presence of community. The imagined presence can operate as a projection or transparency, able to overlay or colour our experiences of the city with our desires for belonging. This thesis proposes that the imagined presence of community provides a useful concept
through which to encapsulate the collective identity definition that can arise though the interplay between the different processes of imagining. It also captures the projective and subjective nature of imagining, such that the presence of community can be imagined as emanating from people and things, regardless of the strength of their relation to any really existing community.

As noted, to explore this process of imagining community within the trajectories of a shifting context, this thesis focuses on consumption practices and experiences within public and quasi-public spaces. Accordingly this review has also provided an overview of research on consumption spaces and the manner in which they may support collective identification. What is clear from existing research is that individual consumption spaces can play an important role as sites for interaction-based identity definition and emotional experiences as anchoring realms. We also know that more open consumption spaces or precincts that operate as exposure realms can bring diverse groups of people together in ways that may work to habituate difference through low-level interaction, as well as provide opportunities for connection through the disruption of those habits. Of course such spaces can also be exclusionary, separating people according to demographics, consumption preferences and social networks. They may also be mundane, and ultimately do little more than reinforce one’s role within the social imaginary of consumer society.

However, this thesis takes a more optimistic approach, and so explores the ways in which the physical, social, and symbolic elements of public and quasi-public spaces, and the experiences that occur within them, may be consolidated into an identity that may become the basis from which a neighbourhood is understood. Shared geography clearly plays a role in facilitating this extension, by operating as a frame for the connections one makes between consumption space-based experiences and neighbourhood identity, as does the potential of consumption spaces to both anchor communities and expose individuals to the identification practices of others. However the subjectivity that is inherent within our interpretation of such experiences as community also highlights the important role of the imagination. It is the aim of this thesis to attempt to take into account the construction and contribution of the imagined presence to this process.
The key question the research explores then is:

*How do an individual’s consumption practices work to construct an imagined presence of neighbourhood-based community?*

In particular, given the focus on public and quasi-public spaces and our experiences within them, the research also asks:

*How do experiences in the public and quasi-public spaces that frame these practices contribute to the construction of this imagined presence?*

To explore this possibility, this thesis focuses on one person’s attempt to construct an experience of belonging to a neighbourhood-based community through consumption practices. A focus on lived experience has been argued to be a useful means of exploring the manner in which the multiplicity of the urban environment comes together in public spaces, and to consider the ways this may be built on to support collective cultures (Amin, 2008; Watson, 2006). As is argued within the methodological chapter, it also allows for an investigation of the subjectivity that is inherent within the imaginative interpretation of consumption practices and spaces as representative of community. The autoethnographic methodology that was applied to explore this construction of imagined community is detailed in chapter four. The following chapter provides a background to the research context, the inner city suburb of Northcote in Melbourne, Australia.
Chapter Three
The Research Context: Northcote, Melbourne

As outlined in the introduction, this thesis draws on my experiences as a new resident of Northcote, Melbourne, and follows my attempt to become a part of that area’s community. This chapter provides an overview of the research site, drawing on the area’s physical and social history and current demographics, to provide insight into the ways that these elements have shaped my imaginings of its community. Drawing on theoretical perspectives of place as unfixed, as outlined in the literature review, the intention of this chapter is to provide a background of the neighbourhood’s cultures and identities so as to ground the discussion of the data presented in the following chapters. In recognition of the importance of situating oneself within this type of ethnographic research, the chapter also provides a brief overview of my reasons for and experience of moving to this neighbourhood.

Northcote is an established residential suburb of approximately 23,000 people, in the inner north of Melbourne, Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012c). It is a part of the City of Darebin, a diverse municipality covering 53 square kilometres, and home to over 136,000 people according to current census data (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012a). Compared to the greater Melbourne metropolitan region, Darebin has lower levels of individual incomes, and higher percentages of residents who are born overseas (in particular from Italy and Greece), who speak languages other than English at home or who report a need for assistance due to disability or old age (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012a, 2012b). In contrast to both Darebin and greater Melbourne, Northcote has higher percentages of high income earners, and lower percentages of those born overseas or who speak languages other than English (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c), reinforcing popular representations of the area as the most gentrified of the municipality. However, Northcote’s municipal context plays an important role in shaping the area both physically and in terms of the manner in which it services residents from surrounding areas. This suggests that whilst the area’s demographic
diversity may be reducing, the impact of this on its culture and identity is not straightforward.

This is in part because the process of gentrification has both production and consumption drivers, and can be shaped by policy decisions and cultural trends decided well outside the specific context. This is certainly the case in Northcote, where the shift in the area’s physical and social makeup cannot be separated from state and local government policies of activity centre densification, local government place-making strategies and attempts to support creative industries, a national housing price boom fuelled by an apparent housing shortage, low rental vacancy rates, and the broad promotion and public acceptance of consumption-based lifestyles and socialising as the model for cosmopolitan inner city living. The consequences of these processes are also shaped by Northcote’s spatial and social history, including patterns of immigration, previous industrial uses, and remnant architecture. These all contribute physical, social, and symbolic resources upon which constructions of neighbourhood identity can be based.

This chapter details aspects of these different elements and the way they shape the area’s cultures and identities, including its demographics and public spaces, and the changes underway in both. The aim is to not only describe aspects of present day Northcote, but also highlight ways the area’s histories continue to reverberate in its present. This is deemed important because – as discussed within the review of literature – these histories can leave traces that can be drawn upon within the imagining of community. However the aim of this chapter is not to define an overarching identity for the neighbourhood of Northcote. This is because, as was outlined in the literature review, imagining community is a subjective process, and thus the definition of place-identity within that is also subjective. That is, this chapter does not propose that my experience of Northcote necessarily reflects that of others, nor that the cues that I draw upon to shape my experience of this place will be understood or used in the same way by others. Instead this chapter presents a range of facts and interpretations in an attempt to provide insight into the different physical, social and symbolic trajectories that come together within the neighbourhood within which I have sought belonging.
To do so, this chapter draws from a history of Northcote written by Lemon (1983), which appears to be the only recent and comprehensive study of the suburb, and the key resource for other accessible histories, such as that of the Darebin Historical Encyclopaedia (e.g., Darebin Historical Encyclopedia, no date-b), and those put together by the University of Melbourne’s history department (e.g., May, no date). The area’s more recent demography and culture is detailed with the assistance of Australian Bureau of Statistics census data from 2001, 2006 and 2011, and newspaper reports from the free, locally distributed Northcote Leader and Melbourne Times Weekly, and the Melbourne daily The Age, as well as some information from internet sites. This overview begins with a historical exploration of Northcote’s physical construction.

The Building of Northcote

As noted above, Northcote is the innermost suburb of the City of Darebin, in the inner north of Melbourne (see figure one). The suburb covers 6.1 square kilometres approximately six kilometres northeast of Melbourne’s centre. Its geography is defined by the meandering routes of two creeks that form the southern and western boundaries, and the rise of Ruckers Hill, rare in this relatively flat city, which provides sweeping views of the central business district to the south and the swathes of suburbs to the east and west. Darebin Road to the north (just off which I lived for much of this research); and Rathmines Street to the east form the boundaries of the neighbouring suburbs of Thornbury and Fairfield. Two main north/south arterial roads, High Street and St Georges Road, further define the suburb’s geography. St Georges Road, near Merri Creek and the western border, is increasingly positioned in planning and transport policy as the preferred thoroughfare for traffic to the outer northern suburbs. High Street is the area’s commercial and retail precinct, and increasingly the site of new medium-density apartment developments. The area to the east of High Street is predominantly residential, and is dominated by free standing Victorian and Edwardian housing.
Northcote, and the greater Melbourne region, was originally home to the Wurundjeri Aboriginal people. The area began to be settled by Europeans in the 1830s, and it was in the later part of this decade that Northcote was first surveyed and sub-divided into long narrow blocks of over 100 acres with frontages to the area’s creeks, with Plenty Road (today’s High Street) as its commercial centre. These blocks where sold off in land sales in 1839 and 1840, mostly to speculators, according to Lemon (1983), thus beginning what can be seen as a long history of property speculation. These speculative purchases, combined with the vagaries of the economy and governance of the still new colony of Melbourne, worked to delay the area’s development as a residential suburb. Instead, up until the 1870s, Northcote and the broader region of Darebin remained mostly farms, infirmaries, piggeries, and slaughter yards, with some focused commercial development around High Street. It was at this time that the crossing at Merri Creek was upgraded, gas began to be piped into the area for lighting, and the area’s primary industries began to give way to brickworks.
The development of Northcote’s brickworks in the 1870s and 80s coincided with Melbourne’s first housing boom, in particular around the expanding railway lines of the southern and western inner city. In comparison Northcote remained relatively isolated, according to Lemon (1983). This was mostly due to the access issues presented by Ruckers Hill and the delays in the building of the northern train line, but was exacerbated by poor drainage, limited road access, and the smells emanating from the polluted Merri Creek. Despite the marketing difficulties this presented, many of Northcote’s early landowners became land speculators, further subdividing the suburb’s farming land into housing lots of varying sizes. This period could be seen as Northcote’s first housing development boom, with over 1500 houses built in the three years from 1885. Much of this was built speculatively and mostly for rental purposes, according to Lemon (1983), with little regulation on lot size or the quality of construction. Despite the apparent lack of regard for the quality of building materials or workmanship, some of the small lot brick terraces built during this period remain standing today, albeit now mostly renovated and fronting the area’s 20th century economic hub, Northcote Plaza, rather than the earlier brickworks.

Further traces of Northcote’s first housing boom remain evident in the area’s architectural styles and street spaces. This includes a long narrow east/west street system, derived from the landowners’ private access roads that were restricted in size to limit land loss and now slow traffic to crawl as they negotiate parked cars in the narrow street, as well as a propensity to name the shorter bisecting north/south streets Groves in recognition of their farming beginnings. The area also contains a substantial number of wooden semi-detached terrace-style houses on small blocks – a testament to the property boom where speed and cost were valued over the quality of build, and the products of the area’s brickworks were being sold elsewhere. A small number of grand houses also remain from this period, originally the mansions of the earliest landowners. The apartment I lived in for much of this research was in a post-war two-storey unit block built immediately behind one of these grand houses. The mansion itself had also been split into flats and thus now offered only glimpses of its previous reign.

The 1880s and early 90s also saw considerable commercial development in High Street, which included the construction of the Town Hall (Darebin Historical
Encyclopedia, no date-c). This joined earlier buildings such as the Shannon Hotel, the Peacock Inn, the Carters Arms and the Wesleyan Methodist Church and School. Many of these buildings remain in some form today, including a number of one- and two-storey Victorian terraces that now house cafes, bars and fashion boutiques. The Town Hall is now a collection of Council offices, public meeting and function areas following extensive renovation in the late 1990s. The Shannon Hotel became the Commercial Hotel, a key meeting place for the establishing Australian Labor Party, and then was demolished and rebuilt in the late 1890s (Darebin Historical Encyclopedia, no date-b). It is now the Northcote Social Club, a destination live music venue and local pub. Both the Town Hall and the Northcote Social Club are important landmark buildings, and hubs of culture and entertainment for the area as a whole. Similarly the Peacock Hotel remains on the same site as the Peacock Inn, though also partially demolished and rebuilt in the 1890s. The Wesleyan School is now also a bar and music venue, whilst the Wesleyan church, built opposite, remains a church and significant community space. The Carters Arms was demolished in 1989 and replaced by the Northcote Central shopping centre (Darebin Historical Encyclopedia, no date-a). A small bar recently took on the Carters name, exemplifying the manner in which traces of history continue to shape expressions of neighbourhood identity, particularly in the High Street area.

The Melbourne housing boom that funded much of this development came to an abrupt halt with a depression in the 1890s, and along with it the economic benefits Northcote’s brickworks brought to the area. The April 1891 census recorded that despite a population of 7,458, 12% of the district’s 1698 houses were unoccupied, and were to remain so for many years (Lemon, 1983). This suggests not only population stagnation, but also high average household sizes. In contrast, Northcote today features an average household size of 2.4 people, and a vacancy rate of 8% (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012c).

Despite the economic slow down of the 1890s, the Ruckers Hill tramline was planned and completed. This required the construction of a bluestone embankment that still offers stunning views of the city from the carriages of today’s number 86 tram. However the 1890s version of this now busy and somewhat (in)famous route was bankrupt by 1893, and struggled on sporadically until 1897 (Lemon, 1983).
Some respite for commuting residents was offered by the completion of the northern train line. However its route into town was circuitous and the service infrequent, offering little reprieve from the isolation for laid-off workers seeking employment. The current route, offering what is now a 20-minute journey into the Melbourne central business district, was not fully operational until the early 1900s.

This cycle of economic expansion and contraction continued throughout Northcote’s early history, and was often accompanied by cycles of property investment. After the depression of the 1890s, the early 1900s brought additional residential and commercial building investment. This included the funding of a public library by American millionaire Andrew Carnegie, which still stands today next to the Town Hall and offers limited community health services, as well as the construction of the first of the many picture theatres in the area. These remain today as function centres, music venues, and heritage frontages to modern apartment developments. Only one operates as a cinema, although another recently ran a special season of films to celebrate the 100th anniversary of its construction. Additional development of business operations on High Street added Edwardian terraces to the Victorian ones, and both telephones and electricity were also introduced into the area. This investment and growth saw the population of the greater region of Northcote, which included areas of what is now Fairfield and Thornbury, grow to over 20,000 people. Thus in 1916, the area was elevated to the status of a City.

The City of Northcote, Between and Beyond the Wars

Northcote, like most communities, suffered through the deprivations of the First World War, yet by the 1920s was entering into a boom period, its population doubling to over 42,000 (Lemon, 1983). Housing development in the area also flourished, increasing from approximately 6,500 houses at the end of World War One to 11,000 by the beginning of World War Two. This period of considerable growth also had the effect of diluting the area’s sense of identity, according to Lemon (1983). Distinct precincts of shops began to develop along High Street at Westgarth, Croxton and Thornbury, diluting Ruckers Hill’s role as the centre of the district. Whilst these shopping areas remain, today’s High Street
features an almost continuous flow of business from Westgarth, at the base of Ruckers Hill, to Preston, the suburb north of Thornbury. It is perhaps fitting that, as High Street’s business corridor appears to be consolidating in this uninterrupted manner, local and state government planning policies are seeking to re-establish Northcote’s role as the central hub for the area, through its designation as a major activity centre (Department of Infrastructure, 2002; Ecologically Sustainable Design & Alphaplan, 2007). The implications of this policy will be discussed in more detail in a later section. The following provides a brief overview of the processes of physical and social change that occurred in the area in the periods before and after the Second World War.

It was in the period after the First World War that Northcote’s proximity to the City of Melbourne began to transform the area into a dormitory suburb, supported by the completion of a direct tram route to the city in 1925. In many ways, then, the 1920s could be seen as Northcote’s first period of gentrification. The working class population that had earlier been attracted to Northcote’s brickworks and slaughterhouses began to give way to one that was more predominantly middle class and who secured detached housing on larger blocks in the suburbs’ western and eastern fringes (Lemon, 1983). The visual distinction remains today, with the remnant housing close to the High Street commercial and industrial areas on very small blocks and of terrace style, and the predominantly residential areas to the east and west featuring Edwardian and Californian style wood and brick detached bungalows on larger blocks and with substantial garden space. Of course these larger blocks now offer opportunities for infill development, and those large garden spaces are beginning to give way to small townhouses built behind existing buildings, or to the demolition of unprotected older housing for medium-density low-rise townhouse developments in line with current densification policies.

As the population grew, so did High Street’s business offering. However, in patterns that continue to mirror issues faced by Northcote traders today, these businesses faced considerable competition from the shopping precincts of surrounding areas such as Collingwood. A traders association formed with the intention of encouraging patronage from residents and those outside the district, chiefly by running free buses from residential and shopping areas to transport patrons to High Street (Lemon,
In a later, more novel attempt to drum up business, traders in the 1950s ran a billy cart derby down one of Northcote’s many hilled roads (Lemon, 1983). The methods of attracting patrons employed by the current day Northcote Business Association are more sophisticated; these include the music-based street festival that provided a temporal frame for this research, a fashion festival featuring the wares of High Street boutiques, and an arts event that displays the work of local artists in shop windows. The billy cart race has also returned in recent years, this time as a back alley alternative to a major Melbourne sporting event. It receives no promotion or official sanction, and is well on the way to becoming a neighbourhood tradition (again).

The depression of the 1930s and the Second World War brought a third era of decline for Northcote; however, by this stage the area’s physical attributes had been mostly defined. High Street was well established as the key business precinct, with small clusters of businesses serving the specific residential areas that straddled the long road, such as Westgarth and Thornbury. The suburb’s general road grid was established, even though many remained unpaved and some of the drainage and sewerage systems left much to be desired. Public transport routes had also been established, and basically mirror those running today, even if the transport itself was somewhat sporadic. Finally the pattern of predominantly single-use residential areas of detached or semi-detached housing was solidly in place.

What this suggests then is that we can view the area’s development from the post Second World War era as less concerned with physical construction, and instead the beginning of a more nuanced layering of the area’s physical and social elements. However, these periods were no more stable than Northcote’s earlier years, bringing further economic contraction in the 1950s along with substantial demographic change, and additional housing development booms. This was also a period in which Northcote’s middle class aspirations and sense of identity began to fade as its distinction from the expanding outer suburbs, and from the working class areas of Fitzroy and Collingwood became less clear (Lemon, 1983).

This loss of identity was perhaps not helped by a period of demolition, with old buildings deemed unclean and thus unhealthy, and trees deemed as in the way of modern facilities (Lemon, 1983). The boulevard of palm trees planted down St
Georges Road as a depression era beautification project were cut down for daring to grow as high as the electricity wires, though the replanted versions thrive today. Similarly, Victorian and Edwardian buildings on High Street lost their verandahs because the pillars were potential impediments to cars, or the buildings were demolished entirely. As will be discussed in chapter seven, the legacy of this period of demolition remains evident today in High Street’s mixture of ornate Victorian, Edwardian shopfronts, and less distinct late twentieth century box-style shop spaces, that combine in a somewhat incoherent manner in a reflection of the area’s diffuse identities.

However, the greatest changes that occurred in the area post the Second World War were driven by shifts in demographics. This is because the 1950s, 60s and 70s were a period when Melbourne’s overall population was significantly boosted by Italian and Greek migration. This wave of immigration made a substantial mark on Northcote, one that is still evident within the area’s public spaces, the lemon and olive trees in its parks, backyards, and road sides, the Greek video shop and cafes, Italian delicatessens, and the groups of elderly men who meet at High Street cafes and in Northcote Plaza. In 1961, the population of Northcote residents born in these nations was at 13% and by 1976 it was at 22% (Lemon, 1983). The percentage remains at just under 9% today, still higher than Greater Melbourne’s 2.9% (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012b, 2012c).

The 1960s and 70s were also a period when, in a continuation of the area’s association with property speculation, developers first began to invest in apartment development. In the five years up until Council planning regulations were tightened in 1971, 270 houses were demolished to be replaced by more than 3000 flats (Lemon, 1983). By 1971, the Darebin region was home to a population of over 150,000, and by 1976 more than a third of Northcote’s dwellings were apartments (Lemon, 1983; Profile id, 2010a). The 2011 census reported Darebin’s population of 136,500. The same census records that in Northcote, detached housing made up 59% of the housing stock, with units and apartments at 21% (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012a, 2012c). This suggests that current development and population increases are returning the area to earlier densities, rather than bringing about dramatic or previously unseen population numbers or densities.
The post-war period was also a time of increased investment in public housing, with the government Housing Commission obtaining substantial tracts of land within the Darebin area for the development of low-cost housing. Some plans were overly ambitious, and did not come to fruition. However, some of the smaller developments that occurred within the area over the 1940s to 60s remain today, including a medium-density public housing estate on Merri Creek, as well as facilities specifically targeted at an aging population. In 2010 one of these older people’s developments was demolished and rebuilt, in a move that may go some way to protecting some of the area’s residential diversity amidst gentrification.

These post-war Housing Commission developments were pressing because the combination of post-war inflation, the slow loss of employment opportunities and the continuing development of newer suburbs with larger houses and blocks had been slowly eroding Northcote’s population of families and middle class. Census data quoted in Lemon (1983) illustrates this trend. As noted above, by 1976 Northcote was home to higher percentages of overseas born residents than Melbourne overall – 35% compared to 27%, 22% of whom came from Greece or Italy. Elderly citizens numbered 17% of the population, against 12% in Melbourne overall, and families with children at home only 35%, compared to Melbourne’s 44%. Finally, perhaps in part due to its proximity to the industrial areas of Collingwood and Fitzroy, and also remnant industrial sites such as the Separation Street brickworks, the area had a higher percentage of working class: 53% compared to 40%; a lower percentage of professionals: 32% compared to 47%; and household incomes that were as much as 25% lower than the Melbourne average.

However, as I have sought to demonstrate in this historical overview, this population spread is best seen as reflective of that specific post-war era, and thus not necessarily representative of Northcote’s long-term demographics. Indeed by the 1981 census, the percentage of tradesmen in the area had reduced to 41%, perhaps in part due closure of the area’s last brickworks in 1977 (Lemon, 1983). Instead I argue that what these figures most clearly reinforce is that the area has historically undergone significant demographic shifts, and that these shifts are often accompanied by intensive periods of residential development. Indeed one could suggest that Northcote’s cycles of housing investment and demographic change are perhaps the
most constant feature of the area’s shifting identity. The following section describes
Northcote’s current phase of change, and considers this in relation to the questions of
community that underlie this thesis.

Northcote Today

Forward 170 years from the first land sales and Northcote is clearly a different kind
of neighbourhood from that imagined by its earliest landowners. At the same time,
as it enters its fifth phase of housing development and associated demographic
change, we can also see how remnants of those earlier periods continue to shape its
identity. Thus while wealthy landowners, farmers, brickmakers, slaughtermen and
Second World War migrants all worked to construct Northcote’s past, the most
influential demographic at present appears to be the ever expanding and fragmenting
middle class. This section describes this current period of physical and demographic
change, drawing on census data, newspaper and online reporting, and government
policy. It begins with an overview of the current development context, and then
explores the demographic shifts that have been associated with it.

Northcote today in policy
As outlined above, Northcote has a history of housing development related change.
However, in contrast to its earlier housing booms, its current phase of physical
change is more regulated. This is primarily because Northcote has been designated
as a major activity centre within Victorian Government planning policy (Department
of Infrastructure, 2002; Department of Planning and Community Development, no
date). This policy recognises the importance of the area as a public transport,
services and entertainment hub for the residents of the neighbourhood and the
adjacent suburbs. It also signals government support for an increase in residential
development, primarily through medium-density apartments, with a focus on
residential opportunities within close proximity to services.

The key geographic focus of the activity centre policy, and this research, is the
Ruckers Hill section of High Street, and the associated spaces around Separation
Street and Arthurton Road. These include the shopping centre Northcote Plaza, All
Nations Park, the Northcote train station, and a large ex-industrial site that has been earmarked for a mixed-use development. As has been outlined above, this precinct has long been Northcote’s most important commercial and public space. Ruckers Hill is now a diverse retail and lifestyle precinct. Its iconic buildings such as the Town Hall, old picture theatres, and pubs now operate as entertainment hubs, whilst Victorian and Edwardian terraces now house bars, restaurants, cafes, fashion boutiques and a range of everyday and professional services. The shopping centre Northcote Plaza was built in the 1980s on the site of the area’s longest running brickworks, which was heavily associated with previous phases of expansion and contraction. The brickworks’ economic replacement is not a destination mall and is instead better described as a broadly targeted and relatively ordinary neighbourhood shopping centre, offering everyday or mundane products and services. The close proximity of these everyday and lifestyle precincts is a key plank of the activity centre designation.

To date, much of the housing development that the activity centre policy has aimed to encourage in this precinct has been in the form of two- and three-storey apartment buildings behind the historical buildings of High Street. There have also been an increasing number of approvals of medium-density developments of up to six storeys on High Street frontages not protected by heritage provisions, and in the immediately adjacent industrial and business zoned areas, primarily between High Street and the train line. This has included the completion of a nine-storey apartment tower above Northcote Plaza in November 2010. At the time of writing there are five similar developments in varying stages of planning, sale or construction within the Ruckers Hill precinct, with a particular focus on the area around Separation Street where there are limited heritage properties and a number of vacant buildings. Whilst these types of activities have been criticised elsewhere as policy mandated gentrification (e.g., Davidson & Lees, 2005), the Victorian Government promotion of such development as a means of fostering vibrant and sustainable communities is also broadly reflective of principles of new urbanism and urban villages planning theories (e.g., Aldous, 1992; Katz, 1994). Nonetheless the new apartment developments are broadly targeted at a middle class demographic, and it is the implications of this investment phase for neighbourhood identity that is of most interest here.
As the responsible local government body, the Darebin City Council’s policy response to the activity centre designation provides the greatest insight into a perceived (or desired) identity of the area. In the Northcote Activity Centre Structure Plan, Darebin City Council articulates a vision for the Northcote Activity Centre to “provide the foundation for the existing and continued vibrant community of Northcote through a regional focus for arts and cultural development of northern metropolitan Melbourne focused around sustainable transport modes and built form” (Ecologically Sustainable Design & Alphaplan, 2007, p. 21). This vision draws on a series of values that the documentation states were identified through research with the intention of guiding the development of the structure plan. These are outlined in the structure plan as follows:

- **Promotion of ecologically sustainable design** as a means of achieving social, cultural, economic and environmental integration. This includes higher density in commercial and mixed-use areas that support more intensive land use, whilst protecting the smaller scale, “cottage” form of surrounding residential areas.

- **Provision of equitable access** to facilities and services to all people, particularly focused around improved pedestrian, cycle and publicly accessible transport.

- **Environments which support community cohesion and neighbourhood interaction**, including opportunities for incidental social interaction in daily life.

- **Physical form and scale that promotes pedestrian use** and shared vehicle / pedestrian environments.

- **Enhancement of Northcote as a self sustaining community** through the promotion of an increased local employment and housing base.

- **Conservation of heritage** and cultural buildings and landscapes through interpretation and design of new development into
heritage buildings and spaces, whilst acknowledging potentially competing values of sustainability and accessibility.

- **Enabling creative, social and cultural diversity** of Northcote to thrive through the provision of affordable housing, business and recreation spaces.

- **Strong community engagement** with a range of social and cultural sectors that supports and enhances the creative and cultural diversity of Northcote.

- **Building form and urban design** that respects the heritage of Northcote whilst setting a new benchmark in quality and sustainability (Ecologically Sustainable Design & Alphaplan, 2007, p. 20 emphasis in original).

These points are later summarised as describing an area that values “social and cultural tolerance, affordable housing and business rentals, diversity in people and spaces and a ‘down to earth’ sense of place and being” (Ecologically Sustainable Design & Alphaplan, 2007, p. 26). Whilst these are clearly desirable qualities, beyond the implication of Northcote being somewhat relaxed and accepting (which I would agree with), there is little within these identified values that could not be readily applied to other gentrifying neighbourhoods seeking to project an image of a diverse and creative community. This seeming inability to articulate a uniquely Northcote identity reaffirms arguments of those such as Amin and Thrift (2002) and Massey (2005) on the unfixed nature of place within the multiplicity of the contemporary city. It is also significant for this thesis, because it allows for a greater diversity of experiences to be imagined as representative of community, but of course also complicates the process of that imagining.

Nonetheless the Darebin City Council policy approach at least appears to recognise some of the implications of the current cycle of investment and change, and aims to not only manage it, but also capitalise upon it. These strategies have included place-making infrastructure to strengthen links between public transport nodes, and an ongoing capital works programs to increase the accessibility of public transport for
all area residents. The latter required substantial road works and disruptions to High Street that area businesses complained caused unacceptable disruptions to their own ability to support the neighbourhood. As noted above, there has also been an increasing number of approvals of medium-density and mixed-use developments, which form part of the strategy to support the area’s sustainability and affordability. Despite this, none have yet appeared to include affordable housing components, and instead tend to come on the property market at rental or sale prices that are generally higher than existing averages.

Activities to support locally-based cultural industries are also included, in line with a perception of the area as an arts and cultural hub. This has included the restoration of the old police station into an arts incubator, zoning changes to support the development of artist studio spaces, as well as partnerships with organisations such as the Northcote Business Association to assist in its production of the arts and cultural events highlighted earlier (Ecologically Sustainable Design & Alphaplan, 2007; Urban Initiatives & Hemisphere Design, 2010). At the same time however, High Street has lost almost all of its art galleries in the last four years, with one of its longest established, an artist-run cooperative, recently closing after Darebin City Council failed to renew its funding. This lead to a number of stories in the free weekly newspaper, the Northcote Leader, highlighting the plight of the gallery and canvassing the impact of rising rents that gentrification can bring for High Street retail sites overall. However, it is many of these same businesses that the Northcote Leader also likes to use as examples of the area’s gentrification, when suggesting for example that “openings of gourmet delis, serving goats cheese and trendy cafes, were a sign yuppies were moving in and manufacturing was moving out” (Healey, 2011), despite that Northcote’s major manufacturing industries had begun moving out over 30 years earlier.

As the overview above has aimed to demonstrate, then, this is not the first interchange between the middle class and manufacturing in Northcote, and when viewed in the context of that history we can read within these policies’ attempts to nurture a 21st century version of a local culture and employment industry. This is an approach that is reflective of the creative city strategies made famous by Florida (2002), and one that has also been associated with processes of gentrification (e.g.,
Lloyd, 2006). Yet as evidenced by the somewhat generalised neighbourhood values stated above, the strategies to date provide limited insight into what exactly constitutes the “vibrant community of Northcote” that these policies aim to support (Ecologically Sustainable Design & Alphaplan, 2007, p. 21). Instead as with Northcote’s previous roles as genteel farmlands, a site of primary production and processing, quarry for Melbourne’s housing boom, dormitory suburb, and haven for migrants, Northcote’s current role as a place of cultural production and middle class consumption could be seen as yet another in its long line of identity incarnations that have at their heart property investment and demographic change.

It should be noted that I am not suggesting that the changes and displacement that periods of gentrification represent are not significant. As Rowland Atkinson et al., (2011) have demonstrated in their exploration of displacement in gentrifying suburbs of Sydney and Melbourne, including Northcote, the stress that this can cause is real. Indeed, as a person used to meagre incomes and to regularly paying over 30% and at times up to 100% of that income in rent, I am well versed in the uncertainties of housing tenure that gentrification can bring. More broadly, however, as discussed within the literature review, this thesis aims to look beyond the rhetoric of gentrification as a process of displacement or destruction of ‘what was’ and instead explore the ways individuals seek experiences of identification and community within the trajectories of these shifting environments, including taking into account the ways what was shapes what is experienced now.

Furthermore, as this contextual overview has sought to suggest, when we alter our temporal and spatial frames we can also see that unstable neighbourhood identities can be the norm, rather than the exception. And whilst this clearly introduces scales of time beyond the experience of current residents, it also highlights the extent to which elements of history continue to shape our experiences of space and place within the present as argued by Massey (2005). It could be suggested then that the most significant elements of Northcote’s history are those that are able to be renegotiated so as to speak to the present regardless of whether or not the current day users recognise the historical link, such as the billy cart races that speak to new traditions, yet continue to attract customers to High Street as per the original traders’ intention, or the pub that once housed political meetings and is now a destination.
music venue, enabling it to continue its role as a meeting place. The following section draws on demographic data and media reporting to explore who these current day users may be, and what further insight this can provide into imagining community within this neighbourhood.

The previous section sought to outline the policy context and related physical changes that are contributing to Northcote’s current identity shift. This final section explores what implications are evident in the area’s current demographics. Gentrification is broadly defined as a class-based process of change, yet as I have sought to demonstrate through this overview, demographic change has been a constant feature of Northcote over its history. This section draws on data from the Australian census, as well as media reports, to provide insight into the types of people who are experiencing (and complicit) in this current phase.

As the data below clearly indicates, Northcote’s population is becoming increasingly middle class, if that is judged according to income, education and occupation. However, time series data from the 2001, 2006 and 2011 census also highlight the extent to which many aspects of Northcote’s demographics have remained relatively stable over this period.

As demonstrated in table one, there has been little or no change in median ages, population densities or housing mobility over the 10 years. However, housing costs have doubled, and incomes have increased by up to 80%. Importantly, these latter increases have also occurred across Darebin and Melbourne, although to a lesser extent. In particular, in both of these regions’ median mortgages and rents have doubled, whilst median incomes have increased by around 65% and 50% respectively (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012d, 2012e).
### Table One: Selected characteristics of the Northcote population

(Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012f)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Median age of persons</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median total personal income ($/weekly)</td>
<td>424</td>
<td>545</td>
<td>730</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median total family income ($/weekly)</td>
<td>1,130</td>
<td>1,475</td>
<td>2,031</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median total household income ($/weekly)</td>
<td>869</td>
<td>1,140</td>
<td>1,559</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median mortgage repayment ($/monthly)</td>
<td>1,083</td>
<td>1,536</td>
<td>2,010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median rent ($/weekly)</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>346</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average number of persons per bedroom</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average household size</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Born overseas</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaks language other than English at home</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lived at same address 1 year ago (aged 15+)</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lived at same address 5 years ago (aged 15+)</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table Two: Northcote age groups

(Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012f)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>2001 %</th>
<th>2006 %</th>
<th>2011%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0–4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5–14</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15–19</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20–24</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25–34</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35–44</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45–54</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55–64</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65–74</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75–84</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85 years and over</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total residents</td>
<td>21016</td>
<td>21789</td>
<td>22673</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Closer examination of age distribution, and household composition confirm there has been little change in these basic demographic markers (see table two and three). Age group comparisons show negligible increases in those aged 5–14, 45–54, and 55–64, and a steady, but still small decline, in those aged 20–34. Trends in household composition are only slightly clearer. These show a general increase in families over the 10 years, and in particular couples with children, and a loss of lone person households.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household Composition</th>
<th>2001 %</th>
<th>2006 %</th>
<th>2011 %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Couple family, no children</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couple family, with children</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One-parent family</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other family</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total families</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lone person households</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group households</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other household</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table Three: Household composition in Northcote

(Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012f)

Whilst the age and household composition data show only limited trends, the growing median incomes detailed above suggest a suburb that is becoming increasingly middle class, or that is moving upward through the middle class ranks. This is supported by data on educational qualifications and occupation presented in tables four and five.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Highest Qualification</th>
<th>2001 %</th>
<th>2006 %</th>
<th>2011 %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Postgraduate qualification</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>23.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor degree</td>
<td>37.7</td>
<td>38.2</td>
<td>40.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced Diploma or Diploma</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate level</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadequately described</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>16.6</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>10.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table Four: Educational qualifications of Northcote residents

(Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012f)
Within the education data in table four we see an increase in those with tertiary qualifications, and particularly those with postgraduate degrees. At the 2011 census, almost 65% of Northcote residents stated they hold tertiary qualifications, which is substantially higher than both Darebin and the greater Melbourne region, at 47.5% and 50% respectively. However the percentage increase in those with Bachelor degrees or higher is relatively consistent across Darebin and Northcote, at around 7%, whilst greater Melbourne recorded a 14% increase, mostly in Bachelor degrees (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012d, 2012e). That is, whilst Northcote’s population is more highly educated than residents within the broader local government area and Melbourne overall, the rate of increase does not differ substantially from the municipality, and is slower than that of the overall metropolitan region.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation Category</th>
<th>2001 %</th>
<th>2006 %</th>
<th>2011%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Managers</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionals</td>
<td>34.9</td>
<td>37.9</td>
<td>41.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technicians and trades workers</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community and personal service workers</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical and administrative workers</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>13.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales workers</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Machinery operators and drivers</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labourers</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadequately described/not stated</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table Five: Occupations of Northcote residents

(Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012f)

Finally, the data on occupation in table five indicates a loss from the Northcote population of people in what may be broadly termed blue collar occupations: trades workers, machinery operators and labourers – from 21.1% in 2001 to 14.3% in 2011. At the same time, we see an increase in management and professional roles over the same period, from 46.7% to 55.2%, and a mostly stable sales and service sector. The time series data on industry of employment also provides some evidence of the increased presence of a creative class, if indicators such as employment in arts and recreation services, information media and telecommunications, and professional,
scientific and technical services are accepted as proxies. Combined, these three categories show a small increase over the 10 years, from 18.9% to 20.9%, with the greatest increasing being in those employed in profession, scientific and technical services, at 2.1%. This industry of employment category also represents the largest increase overall. This suggests that despite efforts to encourage arts and cultural industries, there has only very limited growth in residents employed in these areas, and instead that Northcote’s gentrifiers may be predominantly managers and professionals.

Therefore, beyond clarifying that yes, Northcote is undergoing yet another stage of class-based change, these demographic details provide limited insight into the manner in which this middle-class demographic has fragmented according to social and cultural capital, and lifestyle preferences. Yet this fragmentation is important, because as urban researchers have noted, different gentrifying areas appeal to different segments of the gentrifying middle class (e.g., Butler & Robson, 2001, 2003). It follows then that exploring this fragmentation can provide some kind of insight into perceived neighbourhood identity and the nature of the community it may support. The following section considers media reporting to consider what it contributes to this exploration of the identity of Northcote’s current population, and the neighbourhood itself.

**Representations of Northcote today**

As noted above, whilst we can broadly identify class-based shifts through demographic data, gentrifying areas can further fragment this middle class according to the specific cultural or lifestyle preferences. The well known Australian demographer Bernard Salt recently suggested that rather than drawing on demographics, a better way to identify gentrification “is to drive around the suburbs and look for market umbrellas with people drinking coffee” (Healey, 2011). Whilst Salt specialises in this kind of sound bite stereotyping, an application of his generalisation highlights the extent to which using broad-based consumption practices to determine gentrification is problematic; in High Street the outdoor cafe tables are mostly protected by building awnings rather than umbrellas, and those whiling away their time drinking coffee at them are as likely to be older Greek men.
as they are to be from demographic groups associated with gentrification. Instead, whilst I agree with Salt in the value of observing on the ground conditions, I suggest that it is by examining the apparent contradictions between this kind of media rhetoric, demographic data, and the actual physical context that we can gain more meaningful insight into gentrifying areas, and the different fragments of the middle class that they may appeal to.

This is in part because gentrification is a topic that can generate significant media interest and debate, which can highlight perceptions of community identity and fears about threats to those boundaries. Northcote’s version however appears to be occurring with limited comment, or at least the local area newspaper, the Northcote Leader has shown a certain level of restraint in its discussion of the changes in the area. Whilst the paper has featured some reporting of the income, ethnicity and lifestyle differences between the populations of Darebin’s suburbs (e.g., Irwin, 2012; Robson, 2011), it has rarely delved into divisive labelling or stereotyping of the cultural groups that typify these differences (beyond the broad generalisations offered by Salt). Instead articles have mostly reported the process of change within Northcote by focusing on issues such as the impacts of rising business rents on long-term family businesses and the diversity of the High Street’s business offering, the loss of local art galleries, and the approval of or applications against the area’s increasing number of medium-density developments (e.g., Irwin, 2011a; Irwin, 2011b; Your say: Bye bye to Northcote's boho retail mix, 2012). Yet they have mostly refrained from launching into the kind of ‘us and them’ rhetoric that discursive battles over this subject can often be reduced to.

Instead, the more extreme public commentary on Northcote’s shifting population and identity has come from newspapers such as the Melbourne daily newspaper, The Age, and popular blogs and websites. This kind of reporting is interesting in that it offers an external perspective of the neighbourhood, and thus the potential to highlight elements that may be less visible to those enamoured of the area, such as myself. However this is mostly offered through a raft of clichés and stereotypes that seem to be contradictory to the age and household composition trends described above. The Age for example, used the release of the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute report on displacement associated with gentrification noted above
(R. Atkinson, et al., 2011) to paint Northcote as a suburb overwhelmed by double-income couples with no kids, driving Subaru all-wheel drives, eating goats’ cheese pizza, doing Pilates, and planting native gardens (Dobbin, 2011). A similarly clichéd stereotype was invoked in the following declaration of Northcote as a “suburb of posers” by (the Sydney based) journalist Joe Hildebrand for The Punch, a news and opinion website:

Many years ago I wrote that there were more lesbians from Perth in Northcote than there were in Perth. Well those lesbians have grown up now and are all either straight or gay parenting activists but they still need their chai-lattes and to interact with people who write screenplays in wine bars. For this precise purpose God created Northcote, where one can marvel at the ambience of passing trams from the comfort of an all-wheel drive people mover while trying to explain to young Rama why he has two mummies (Maguire, 2009).

Whilst this opinion piece relies on flagrant stereotyping in a supposed attempt at satire, the follow-up story in the Northcote Leader made little attempt to question the veracity of such a description. In what could be said to be a reflection of the “down to earth” nature of the area described in the Structure Plan vision, one resident argued the area was the “antithesis of poser because you are allowed to be whoever you want to be. There is an understanding amongst the community here that you can transcend norms in Northcote and it is acceptable” (Robson, 2009). Another however, who was first described as defending the diversity of the area against labelling, was then quoted as adding “Northcote mums are the biggest posers because they use their kids as accessories in a full eclectic style but they look good so who cares?” (Robson, 2009).

A more tongue in cheek emphasis on a poser demographic was broadly on display in the popular success of the work of Melbourne comedic musician, the Bedroom Philosopher. His concept album and comedy show, Songs from the 86 Tram, featured songs that typified the range of experiences one may have whilst on the long laboured over tram route that runs up Ruckers Hill and into Melbourne’s outer northern suburbs. This includes the overheard telephone conversation of a hungover twentyomething Northcote ‘scenester’ who, amongst his tales of a recent band
competition win and resultant recording contract and memory stick full of Myspace friends, recounts having to go to hospital to get cut out of his skinny jeans, and then spills his tofu salad (The Bedroom Philosopher, 2011).

Similarly to the Punch description, the song Northcote (So Hungover) parodies a specific demographic stereotype that is easy to discount as not being fully representative of Northcote. I see many mothers with prams, people in cafes with laptops (myself included), Subaru drivers (again myself included) and young men in tight jeans (often on fixed gear bicycles, another ‘typical’ feature), yet I can’t think of where in Northcote sells chai lattes or tofu salad, or how one would write a screen play in any of the bars which are generally too poorly lit or noisy for any type of focused reading or writing. Furthermore, as examination of basic demographic data above suggests, those Subaru drivers are as likely to be in their 40s and 50s, and are perhaps ferrying their skinny-jean wearing teenage children about. Likewise, those posers in cafes are perhaps working out of home because they have little space for work or study in their small Victorian weatherboard rental share house.

Other notable attempts at description of the neighbourhood include the inclusion of Northcote in a Melbourne version of the popular blog Stuff White People Like, which broadly parodies and stereotypes the consumption preferences and practices of the white middle-class. The Melbourne version described Northcote as “genius” because it has:

… somehow managed to defy geography and pass itself off as a gritty inner city urban wonderland. The brilliance of this suburb is only magnified when you go there and discover it’s mostly just a few kebab joints and a massive indoor shopping centre with Kmart, two Coles, Donut King and a fucking Bakers Delight … I don’t know how, but Northcote has brainwashed Melbourne white people. Go there to experience genius (Ben, 2009).

A commenter to this blog post added, “I don't understand this place either. … Northcote's bars are strewn between cash-lending stores, discount vitamin shops (they're everywhere, man), 1970s-styled acupuncture centres and several forlorn-looking second-hand bookstores and health food shops” (Ben, 2009). Interestingly this piece of satire and the follow-up commentary seems to come closest to capturing
the nature of Northcote today, because in many ways, the overwhelming
ordinariness of Northcote Plaza and High Street is one of the key features of the
area.

Beyond reinforcing that categorisation remains a fundamental element of
neighbourhood identification, I suggest what these varying media descriptions most
clearly highlight is a lack of certainty as to exactly who this gentrifying stereotype is
that these journalists and writers so wish to be able to label. Indeed, as one of the
few commenters to the online version of the Northcote Leader poser story noted,
labelling people according to the suburb they inhabit is at best, “boring” (Robson,
2009), and terms such as poser and scenester offer little more descriptive value than
those more frequently substituted for fragments of the middle class, like yuppies,
latte/cappuccino-sipping trendies, bohemians, and more recently hipsters.

Furthermore these stereotypes could easily be applied to any area that appeals to
certain middle class demographics, and thus do little more than reconfirm broader
cultural trends common in many contemporary Western cities, such as shifts to more
flexible working patterns, the mainstreaming of vegetarianism, and consumption
spaces as a key manner in which potentially isolated populations (such as mothers
with young children, or those who work from home) seek social interaction. Instead
I argue that this inability to clearly identify who or what is unique, or changing,
reinforces the perspective adopted here of place identity as constructed in moments
of encounter, and of the value of the focus on those subjective imaginings that is
proposed within this thesis.

The aim of this section then has been to seek to provide a picture of the social and
demographic features of Northcote’s current identity. As the census data
demonstrates, it is undeniable that gentrification is occurring when considered
according to income, education, and occupation. However the demographic data also
suggests declines in other groups that can be associated with gentrification, such as
those aged between 20–34 and lone person households, as well as an increase in
families. The characteristics of a specific middle class fragment are also difficult to
pin down. Media representations paint a range of stereotypes – of posers and
scenesters who are identifiable by their food preferences, styles of dress, and
sexuality, which I argue have limited representative value, and appear to contradict both the demographic data, and each other.

Instead I suggest what facts and representations mostly clearly describe is a suburb that appeals to a broad range of people for reasons that cannot quite be grasped. Indeed as per the somewhat unclear set of values outlined in the Northcote Structure Plan suggests, the area is perhaps best described as down to earth because it offers sufficient physical and cultural diversity to allow most people to identify with some segment of its overall offering. In that respect then I argue that Northcote could be seen as reflective of the types of communities that Amin and Thrift describe as representative of everyday life in the contemporary city; those without an identity in which members co-belong, without any representable conditions of belonging (2002). The final section of this chapter provides a brief overview of my own reasons for, and experience of moving to this neighbourhood.

Northcote and I

As a mid-30s female, who is well educated, white, childless, lives alone, and has a penchant for wine bars, old pubs, and a well-crafted espresso (yes, I also do Pilates and like goats’ cheese, but prefer triple crème brie), I am also broadly definable as of the gentrifying middle class (the student income notwithstanding). I moved from (a gentrifying suburb of) Brisbane to Melbourne in May 2008. This shift of approximately 2000 kilometres was undertaken with limited knowledge or experience of Northcote, and Melbourne as a whole, with no established social networks through which to ease the transition. My specific decision to move to Northcote was informed by assessments on rental affordability, proximity to public transport and the central business district, and assumptions about local amenities and culture (all determined through online searches). However my choice of this area over other neighbourhoods offering similar access and facilities was mostly driven by an uninformed yet intuitive certainty that the neighbourhood would suit me.

Indeed, before I moved here I had only visited the area three brief times. Once was to see a band, where I caught a taxi to and from my accommodation in the nearby (and very gentrified) suburb of Fitzroy, and spent the entire time within one of the area’s old pub cum destination music venues. The second was a reconnaissance

Chapter Three: Research Context
mission. That is, I had already decided I would be moving here and came to assess the sense of that decision. After a brief and underwhelming walk up and down the Ruckers Hill section of High Street in the rain, I retired to a cafe for coffee and baked eggs. Both the cafe and the baked eggs remain my favourite within the street’s range of cafe offerings, some of which I still have not even tried. My final visit was to find somewhere to live, during which I looked at only two flats (one of which I lived in for the next four years) and then returned to the same cafe. Thus, whilst my assumption that the physical, social, and symbolic resources offered by the neighbourhood would align with my desired sense of place proved to be correct, the manner through which I came to this conclusion had little basis in actual experience.

As I recognise now, my intuitive certainty regarding Northcote’s suitability is a testament to the strength of that difficult to define down to earth sense of place, and the implicit ways this is communicated through its physical, social, and symbolic elements. However, despite living here for over four years, like those media commentators above, I too still find it difficult to articulate exactly what unique qualities my identification is based upon, beyond perhaps the area’s ability to offer a sufficient range of experiences to enable its diverse population some element of place identification. Nonetheless I recognise the strength of my own attachment to this neighbourhood in the sense of relief I feel when I cross the creek that forms the suburb’s western and southern boundary, or the flicker of expression on the faces of others when I tell them I live here. Or perhaps what I see is the flash of that person’s identification with the fragment of Northcote that they identify with, or against. For, as researchers – and the media representations above remind us – identity is defined as much by what a place or person is not, as what it is. It is this process at arriving at this sense of identification and belonging that belies articulation that is the focus of this thesis.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to provide a background of the physical and social elements of the neighbourhood that has been the context of this research, to provide insight into the ways that these elements have shaped my imaginings of its community. In
many ways the conclusion of this chapter is that a Northcote identity is not one that is able to be easily articulated, and instead is continually shifting in line with its phases of housing development and related demographic change. This perspective is supported by the lack of clear values identified in the Northcote Activity Centre Structure Plan, and the media discourse surrounding the area’s gentrification. Instead, as the overview above has sought to demonstrate, Northcote’s history, demographics and culture introduce of range of trajectories that offer its diverse residents different ways of experiencing its sense of place. Or, as per the literature review, Northcote is a place whose identity is unfixed and is instead constructed by individuals within moments of negotiation of those trajectories.

Therefore what is of interest to this thesis is not that Northcote has been slowly gentrifying, nor that the activity centre designation and the associated place-making policy suggests an escalation in this process. Instead the research is interested in the conditions this may suggest with relation to the ways community can be imagined.

As outlined within the review of literature, consumption practices and spaces are able to support collective identification in a range of ways, and in gentrifying neighbourhoods we often see a shift toward more targeted lifestyle oriented spaces and patterns of consumption that can segregate different demographic groups. This is certainly happening in Northcote, where as described above, we see High Street specialising as a lifestyle precinct, whilst Northcote Plaza offers more everyday consumption experiences. However, even that distinction overlooks the extent of the layering of the physical, social, and symbolic in these spaces, and the manner in which this could be seen to offer nuanced experiences of identity definition.

Exploring the manner in which these elements come together in ways that are imagined to be community is the focus of this thesis. The data collection and analysis processes that I applied to investigate this ongoing process of imagining community are described in the following chapter.
Chapter Four
Research Methodology

This chapter outlines the theoretical background and rationale for the methodology of autoethnography that was utilised for this thesis. As concluded within the literature review, the process of interest here is how do individuals’ consumption practices work to construct the imagined presence of neighbourhood-based community, with a particular focus on the ways experiences in the public and quasi-public spaces that frame these practices contribute to that imagining.

To explore these questions this thesis has chosen to focus on the author’s lived experience of attempting establish a sense of belonging to a neighbourhood-based community through consumption practices. Considering this process from an individual perspective was deemed valuable because of the subjectivity that is inherent within the processes of imagining community as outlined in the literature review. Furthermore, as discussed in relation to the research context in chapter three, the neighbourhood in which I sought this experience of belonging was one in which place-identities were unfixed, and best described as subjectively constructed through encounters with the area’s shifting physical, social and symbolic elements. Thus, by focusing on one person’s experience, the research aimed to explore the extent to which we can imagine ourselves into experiencing the belonging of neighbourhood-based community through consumption practices within the shifting environment of the contemporary inner city.

It is my interest in the subjectivity that underlies this experience of belonging that drove the decision to apply an autoethnographic methodology. This methodology, which has its roots in anthropology and autobiography, can be utilised to examine personal experiences in ways that can also illuminate certain aspects of broader social phenomena, and invite readers to critically reflect on their own experiences. As this chapter will outline, this introspective approach enables the exploration of elements of an individual’s experiences, interpretations, and emotional responses that may be difficult to investigate through other qualitative methods.
In that respect then, autoethnography offers a useful means of examining my negotiations of the physical, social, and symbolic elements of Northcote as I worked to construct moments of place, and experiences of belonging to community. In doing so, this research seeks to capitalise on the downplayed connections between urban researchers, as inner city residents and consumers, and the issues that they study. In this way, this research seeks to extend, rather than challenge, traditional urban ethnographic approaches, by speaking both to current theoretical concerns regarding the concept of place-based community, and readers’ lived experiences of it. To put it more strongly, the thesis takes the view that autoethnography is not epistemologically antithetical to conventional ethnography. Whilst it capitalises on introspective accounts, this thesis simultaneously interrogates context and theory. In this sense whilst autoethnography draws on subjectivities, it does not follow that the findings are either private or solipsistic. Instead, as this research has sought to demonstrate, autoethnography can open up the personal so it is able to be critiqued by others, and reflexively applied to their own experiences.

This chapter thus begins with an overview of the theoretical background of autoethnography as a methodology. This section outlines the approach to autoethnography this research adopted, which aimed to balance theoretical relevance and introspective insight. It also seeks to situate this autoethnographic research within the broader discipline of urban ethnography, and in doing so to clearly identify the contribution that this investigation seeks to make. A discussion of the specific research methods and processes of analysis that were applied in this thesis follow this introduction to the methodology. This includes a discussion of the processes that were introduced to structure the data collection and analysis, and thus remain focused on the problems of the thesis. Finally, a discussion of the limitations of the methodology concludes the chapter.

**The Autoethnographic Methodology**

This thesis employed an autoethnographic methodology, understood here as a form of research in which the experience of an individual is used to construct a narrative that illustrates processes of creating, negotiating, and performing meaning (Ellis,
2004; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). As a reflexive exploration of a particular process, the personal experiences highlighted through autoethnography can be used to illuminate certain aspects of broader social phenomena, and invite readers to critically reflect on their own experiences (L. Anderson, 2006a; Ellis, 2004; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). The aim of autoethnography then, is to incorporate the I into research and writing in a manner that may also represent an other (Davis & Ellis, 2008; Sparkes, 2002). In this case I sought to connect the personal experience of attempting to integrate into neighbourhood-based community through consumption practices and spaces, with broader cultural and theoretical ideas of what place-based community represents, and how it may be experienced in the contemporary city.

Autoethnography has its roots in both anthropology and autobiography (Reed-Danahay, 1997), and in this thesis is used to refer to a range of types of research that incorporate the researcher as subject; such as narratives of the self, personal narratives, researcher introspection, subjective personal introspection, personal ethnography, autobiographical ethnography, reflexive ethnography, and native ethnography (see Ellis & Bochner, 2000 and Gould, 2011, for extensive lists of similar terms). The expansion of these types of introspective personal narratives within research is generally linked to what has been called the crisis of representation that was brought on by theories of postmodernism and reflexivity, and which called into question the possibility of objectivity within qualitative research (Ellis, 2004; Reed-Danahay, 1997). However, the acceptance of the validity of the researcher’s subjective voice is also seen as an extension of a long history of anthropological and ethnographic projects in which the researcher’s identity and the subject matter have been intertwined, and where the resultant research is co-produced by researcher and participant (P. Atkinson, 2006; Reed-Danahay, 1997). The difference in these introspective approaches depend in part on where the research emphasis is placed: on the auto (self), the ethno (culture), or the graphy (the research process) (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Reed-Danahay, 1997). In this thesis both the self and culture are considered, through an exploration of the processes through which I, as subject, drew on elements of a broader culture, the consumption-based lifestyle practices of the Western urban middle class, in my attempt to become a part of the specific culture of a neighbourhood-based community.
Whilst autoethnography is promoted as a methodology that is fluid and flexible (Ellis, 2004), there continues to be disagreement regarding the weight placed on these categories of self, culture, and process. This was clearly demonstrated by the debate on analytic autoethnography in a 2006 edition of the Journal of Contemporary Ethnography where different approaches to conducting and reporting on autoethnographic research were outlined (see for example L. Anderson, 2006a, 2006b; P. Atkinson, 2006; Denzin, 2006; Ellis & Bochner, 2006; Vryan, 2006). Whilst reinforcing that autoethnography remains a contested methodology, even amongst its proponents, this debate also highlights the breadth of research subjects to which autoethnography has been applied. Thus, and in line with the emphasis on subjectivity and emotional experiences, autoethnography has been creatively and evocatively applied to explorations of traumatic experiences such as abortion, mental illness, and the death of loved ones (e.g., Ellis & Bochner, 1992; Rolling Jr., 2004; Ronai, 1996), and presentations of research in the form of novels, or poetry (e.g., Ellis, 2004; Kozinets, 2011; Wijland, Schouten, & Sherry Jr., 2010). Furthermore, as illustrated by introspective work within the discipline of consumer research, autoethnography has also be used to provide insight into the conscious and subconscious processes involved in more everyday activities, such as listening to music, or going through a family photograph collection (e.g., Holbrook, 2005; Shankar, 2000). Finally, it can also be applied in analytic ways in combination with traditional ethnographic work, which capitalises upon the heightened reflexivity and greater visibility of the self that autoethnography encourages (L. Anderson, 2006a, 2006b).

This thesis does not aim to be the type of evocative autoethnography that Denzin described as the “messy vulnerable text that makes you cry” (Denzin, 2006, p. 421). However, neither do I subscribe to the view that an exploration of one person’s experience cannot have theoretical and substantiative relevance. Instead I have adopted the both ... and perspective proposed by Burnier, who views autoethnography as an opportunity to be “both personal and scholarly, both evocative and analytical” (2006, p. 414; see also Vryan, 2006). In part, the adoption of this both … and approach is because I enjoy theoretical abstraction. However it also stems from attempts to balance the potentially problematic focus on the experiences of one respondent, myself, with the opportunities the autoethnographic
approach offers in being able to explore the complexities of the imaginative
construction of place that is the focus of the research. Thus, through the analysis and
writing up process I have aimed to weave theory and empirical data into a coherent
narrative that makes a credible, reflexive, and substantiative contribution, and retains
a sense of lived experience.

The focus on the experiences and interactions of individuals within neighbourhood-
based communities is a common one within urban studies, and in that respect this
thesis continues an established history of ethnography and participant observation
within urban studies. This field work methodology is associated with the early
sociology of the Chicago School, and has been used to produce classic sociological
studies such as Gans’s (1962) exploration of neighbourhood change in Boston’s
West End, and Elijah Anderson’s (1978) and Spradley and Mann’s (1975) studies of
social group structures and gender roles within consumption spaces. More recent
work by Lloyd (2006) on what he terms neo-bohemia and its role in the
gentrification of Wicker Park, Chicago, and Blokland’s (2003) exploration of the
nature of contemporary urban bonds through a study of Hillesluis, in Rotterdam,
continue to demonstrate the potential of ethnographic research to make significant
empirical and theoretical contributions to our understanding of urban contexts.

In line with the subjectivity that is inherent within ethnography, these research
projects also all share a researcher who acknowledges their presence within the
research. Anderson’s personal experiences of his patronage of Jelly’s play an
important role in his construction of the story of the interactions between that group
of men (1978). Lloyd’s nights out in the bars and cafes of Wicker Park provide a
narrative structure to his study of the role of the arts and cultural industries in the
gentrification of that neighbourhood (2006). Similarly Zukin’s personal experiences
of New York City are drawn on to illustrate and elaborate on her conceptual
arguments on urban authenticity (2010). What is less common, however, is urban
ethnography that places the researcher at the centre of the study. That is, research
that explicitly capitalises upon the fact that many urban researchers are themselves

---

1 I acknowledge that Gans has stated he prefers the terminology of participant
observation to describe the methodology of his work (1999).
examples of, and often contributors to, the issues that they study. It is the opportunity offered by the participant role that this research seeks to capitalise upon.

In their recent autoethnographic work, Schlichtman and Patch (2011) also recognise the potential of the subjective position of many urban researchers. In doing so, they call on urban scholars to reflexively explore the ways their personal histories intersect with gentrification, and the manner in which this shapes their research perspectives. In a paper grounded in their personal experiences within gentrifying neighbourhoods, Schlichtman and Patch demonstrate ways that the introspective analysis that autoethnography encourages can shed light on the complexities of the gentrification process. In particular their stories of acting out, and yet also questioning their roles as gentrifiers, emphasise the complexity of tastes, experiences, demographics, and values that have come to be subsumed under that term. In this thesis I argue that the subjectivity that is inherent within the ways that these processes are negotiated on an everyday basis also suggests the kind of autoethnographic investigation undertaken here can make an important theoretical contribution.

Through this thesis then, I second Schlichtman and Patch’s call, and seek to act on this by placing my own experiences at the centre of my research, and using those experiences as a means of exploring the ways moments of place-based belonging are constructed. In using a longitudinal approach to do so, I am also able to contribute to questions on the impact of the types of public space encounters that are argued as being able to generate conviviality, and yet are often concluded as being able to do so based on fragmentary observation. This is a limitation, according to Valentine and Sadgrove, as it undermines our abilities to explore how such encounters are shaped by personal histories, as well as their longer-term meaningfulness (2012). That is, the extent to which our interpretations of fleeting interactions may draw on memory traces, or be projected onto future negotiations. As discussed within the review of the literature taking the potential of projections into account is an important aspect of the exploration of imagined community, and one that the autoethnographic methodology applied here supports.

The intention for this thesis then was to explore how consumption practices and experiences within the public and quasi-public spaces that frame them may support
the construction of an imagined presence of neighbourhood-based community that speaks to both current theoretical concerns regarding the concept of place-based community, and readers’ lived experiences of it. The research sought to do so by drawing on a reflexive exploration of my experiences within Northcote’s shopping centre, cafes, retail shops, bars, and the public spaces that connect them, to consider the ways these consumption-based uses of public space intersect with personal desires to identify with and belong to place. The data collection and analysis processes that I applied to investigate the process of imagining community are described in the following sections.

Data Collection Methods

As broadly recommended within ethnographic research, this thesis draws on data collected through intensive immersion in the research context. This included the collection of documentary evidence, such as newspaper articles, government policy documents, and photographs, and observation of the actions of those with whom I shared Northcote’s public and quasi-public spaces. Mostly, however, data collection followed the basic ethnographic approach associated with Chicago School fieldwork methods: “hang around, observe and record my observations” (Shaffir, 1999, p. 678). However in this case, my own actions, interactions, and reactions were the primary object of my observations, rather than those of others. These observations were captured in research memos as recommended by Ellis (2004), with over 190 pages of field notes recorded on just over 160 different consumption and public space-based experiences. The following section describes the strategies and processes established to attempt to systemise and delimit that process, so as to remain focused on the research problems of this thesis.

I began recording my experiences upon my arrival in May 2008, thus capturing my initial experiences of learning about my new neighbourhood. This period could also be understood as a period of scoping, during which I explored the basic physical layout of the neighbourhood and began to develop an understanding of the ways its public and quasi-public spaces served different groups in the community. It was also during this initial period that I was establishing my own relationship to the area’s
geography and built environment, including habitual routes and specific consumption space preferences, many of which still remain in place over four years later. The research memos I recorded during this period thus became an important reflection of my initial impressions of my new neighbourhood and conversely also a reflection on the strength of the habits and attachments that anchored me in the neighbourhood that I had recently left. The influences of these earlier habits and expectations on my imaginings of my new neighbourhood are explored in chapter eight.

The focus of the autoethnographic data collection was the period from September 2008 to September 2009, using the annual High Vibes festival as a significant event with which to benchmark the beginning and end of this process. This was a music-focused festival that took place in the Ruckers Hill area of High Street and was organised by the Northcote Business Association. It was positioned as a celebration of local culture and thus, I assumed, presented an opportunity in which community identity could be created and reinforced. The festival also offered me the opportunity to observe and engage with a range of individuals whom, I assumed, would identify in some way with the Northcote place-identity, in a variety of consumption spaces and experiences. As a temporal frame for the attempt to integrate into a community, High Vibes also provided a useful experiential benchmark. If the integration project was successful it could be assumed that High Vibes 2009 would offer a greater sense of familiarity, recognition, and sense of identification and belonging than the 2008 festival.

This benchmarking process was somewhat successful, if I were to gauge it on the numbers of people I knew and saw at the second festival compared to the first, and the increased sense of certainty that I knew how to best negotiate the crowds and regulations so as to achieve a more local experience. Yet as a measure of an experience of community, it was also problematic. This is primarily because the festival itself did not really operate as a celebration of local identity, and instead as free, street-based music festival, which attracted crowds of up to 100,000 people. Indeed, High Vibes was cancelled in 2010 due to concerns with the safe management of crowd numbers and alcohol. It returned in 2011 as a daytime festival that sought to appeal to a broader audience and which I was involved in organising.
The 2011 festival attracted a more manageable 45,000 people, still significantly higher than the area population of around 23,000. As discussed in the previous chapter, this broad appeal is reflective of Northcote’s role as entertainment hub for people outside of its residential boundaries. It also reinforces the argument presented in chapter three on the extent to which Northcote’s spaces and activities offer identification opportunities for a broad demographic.

In addition to this focused time frame for data collection, a further delimitation was introduced by focusing on activities occurring only within quasi-public and public spaces. Thus memos focused mostly on my actions and interactions within High Street and Northcote Plaza, including where I went and why, and whom I saw and spoke to. This included recording the content of my conversations, as relevant to the research questions, and my reflections on these conversations as they confirmed and challenged my own ideas and experiences. I also recorded the assumptions and associations I made between the identities of a range of neighbourhood consumption spaces and the people who used them, both as individuals and collectively. This captured the connections I made between specific place-based behaviours and the broader neighbourhood context, and thus also incorporated elements of observation of the consumption and social practices of other neighbourhood residents. Finally I explored my emotional responses to these experiences, both recording the ways that interactions made me feel, and then attempting to interrogate these emotional responses reflexively, so as to draw out their relation to identity definition.

Data memos were recorded during, and as soon as possible after each event. This process was aided by mobile phone text messages and emails that were utilised as a means of recording pertinent information during or immediately following an event of interest, becoming what has been referred to as jotted notes (J. Lofland, Snow, Anderson, & Lofland, 2006). This practice also introduced an element of temporal layering, allowing for the recording of, and differentiation between, interpretations and emotional responses that occurred during an event, and those that occurred afterwards. In this respect the cultural context in which the research was conducted aided the data collection process, as it is now generally acceptable to sit in cafes and bars, either individually or with groups of people, and send text messages, or write emails on phones and laptops. As recommended by Lofland et al. (2006), I also
included remembered incidents, further adding to this temporal richness, and working towards addressing some of the limitations introduced by the contexts in which some data was collected, for example, in busy, loud, and very interactive spaces such as bars, or whilst undertaking habitual practices such as supermarket shopping.

As noted above and illustrated in chapter three, I collected relevant newspaper articles from the area’s newspapers, the Northcote Leader and the Melbourne Times Weekly, both of which are free and distributed to letterboxes. I also looked at policy documentation from Darebin City Council, with a particular focus on those related to the activity centre designation and associated planning processes. I monitored and contributed to the public consultation that occurred around the High Street public transport and streetscape upgrades, and collected public consultation information related to some of the property development applications that were under consideration. Finally, I joined Facebook groups dedicated to the neighbourhood, High Street and Northcote Plaza and monitored their commentary. Most of these groups were limited in their activity, even those with a specific marketing purpose, such as of the Northcote Business Association that represents Ruckers Hill traders.

This documentary data was collected in recognition that these discursive elements played an important role in shaping my understanding of my neighbourhood, and my experiences within it. It also provided a record of specific incidents within the broader changes occurring within the neighbourhood’s public spaces, such as the closing of an art gallery or long established shop, or the approval of another medium-density apartment development. In this way, the documentary data also provided information that supported, questioned, and elaborated on my own interpretations of my experiences within and attachments to Northcote’s public spaces. The following section describes the processes that were applied to analyse this range of data.

Data Analysis: Analysing interaction, emotion and imagination

Standard methods of qualitative research generally suggest that data collection and analysis are conducted in tandem so to enable developing concepts to shape data
collection decisions. For this research, however, a decision was made early on within the data collection process to separate these elements. This is because I felt that the analytical distance required to conduct data analysis would be an unnecessary impediment to the open, exploratory, and uncensored attitude I felt that was required for the data collection. In particular I quickly realised that, as a researcher, it was difficult to resist the desire to test developing theories, and yet, for myself as an individual, this often created problematic expectations of outcomes. It was instead decided that delineating these processes offered a clearer, and less emotionally trying, means of achieving the both … and approach adopted for this thesis. That is, both immersing myself within the processes of seeking belonging within a place-based community, and analytically exploring the emotional, subjective, and imaginative elements of this process. Thus, whilst I naturally began to develop a sense of underlying themes and ideas, the data analysis was not begun in earnest until the designated data collection timeframe was complete in September 2010.

The analysis focused on the interplay between these interactions, my emotional responses, and the identity attributions recorded within my research notes. Using the data analysis program NVivo, the data was initially categorised according to the different consumption spaces I frequented, and the different people I had met within them. I further differentiated this by considering whether I visited, or only referred to the location, and whether I interacted with, saw, or wanted to see specific people. This allowed me to start distinguishing between interaction-based experiences, reflexive interpretations of observed interactions, and imagined happenings that projected my hopes and desires for identity definition.

To then more closely explore the different types of interactions associated with these people and places I drew on Loiland’s (1998) differentiation of the types of secondary relations that may occur in public spaces. These are defined as fleeting, routinised, quasi-primary and intimate-secondary, with shifts in the relational types occurring as information is exchanged between parties, and emotional impact increases. In particular, quasi-primary relations describe brief moments of shared experience that have emotional consequences but require no ongoing commitment. Intimate-secondary relations are those of acquaintances, implying that shared experiences will shape future interactions. It would be expected then that both of
these relational types would feature within the development of place identification and experiences of belonging, with the shift from quasi-primary to intimate-secondary suggesting a move from abstract collective to individual identification experiences as relations become more personal.

I approached the process of trying to understand my emotional responses to these interactions in a similar manner, utilising Richins’ (1997) descriptors of emotions experienced through consumption. This typology was developed from consumer research and psychological literature on emotions, to assist in the measurement of consumption-related emotions. Because of the qualitative nature of the work, the range of the emotion types was the most relevant factor guiding this decision. That is, the framework was adopted as a starting point, rather than a fixed set of emotions that I expected my responses to fall within. The emotions set includes anger, discontent, worry, sadness, fear, shame, envy, guilty, loneliness, romantic love, love, peacefulness, contentment, optimism, joy, excitement, surprise, proud, eager and relieved. Categorising emotional responses in this way worked to highlight how my responses were often a combination of a number of different emotions, and that clusters of positive or negative emotions were evident. It also illustrated the manner in which positive and negative affects were related to expectations, such as when discontent followed optimism or surprise, or in illustrating how worry changed to excitement as experiences unfolded. Finally, tracking emotional changes over the course of episodes illustrated the power of emotional contagion (Pugh, 2001), and the manner in which it was not only related to social interaction, but also to other elements within the consumption space, for example music, or weather.

Finally I tried to elucidate the connections between emotions and acts of imagination in my research notes by exploring the different types of imagining I engaged in. As discussed within the literature review the processes of imagination can be broadly considered as being reproductive, or productive. It is the productive imagination that was the focus of my analysis, because it is through this creative capacity that both reflexivity and fantasy can be achieved. These moments are evident in my research notes as wondering about seeing specific people or experiences, or through creating scenarios and imagining outcomes. This included reflexive moments of seeing … as (Hanson, 1986), where I began to make connections between my own consumption-
based experiences and broader imaginative interpretations of their collective identity defining meanings. There were also moments that could be considered pure fantasising: how interactions may play out, or what might happen next time I go somewhere and see somebody, or if only so and so would do this or that. These imaginative processes and their influence on my experiences of community in Northcote are explored in detail in chapter eight.

It was in the consideration of the role of imagination in my construction of community connections that the analytical categorisation of interactions and emotions described above was most effective. This is because when attempting to differentiate between my moments of reflexivity and fantasy, for example, it was at times difficult to maintain an analytical perspective. For this reason, being able to systematically categorise my developing relationships, emotional responses and imaginative wonderings became an important means of managing the emotional consequences of analysing my own actions, hopes, disappointments and attachments. As Ellis (2004) notes, undertaking autoethnographic research challenges the researcher to acknowledge their vulnerability, and as noted above, this was a significant issue faced throughout the research. It was for this reason also that establishing a focused time frame for data collection was beneficial. By September 2010 I was beginning to feel the strain of constantly placing my experiences under a reflexive microscope, and beginning to be concerned for the implications this may have had for the ways that I viewed my relationships with some of the people with whom I interacted, as is implied in chapter six. In that respect it was a relief to move from the data collection to data analysis phase, although as discussed in more detail below, and throughout the thesis, the level of self-analysis that this type of autoethnography requires was in itself no easy task.

The Ethical Considerations of Autoethnography

This potential for vulnerability also highlights an important ethical issue related to autoethnography. Because the author as subject is identifiable, it places an additional impetuous on them to protect others who may be implicated within the research (Ellis, 2007; Etherington, 2004). The public nature of the interactions and spaces
focused on in this research removed some of these concerns, because the events reported on were open to general observation. Pseudonyms have been adopted for the businesses and individuals involved; however, it is recognised that readers familiar with the area may be able to identify the consumption spaces and some of the people I discuss.

For this reason I also adopted an overt but generalised position with regard to my research interests and intentions when inevitably they arose in conversation. In many respects this was beneficial to the research, as discussion of my research elicited stories from others as to their experiences of specific consumption spaces and the neighbourhood generally. I also aimed to keep such discussions generalised. That is, I would talk about neighbourhood identity broadly, or discuss research implications with regard to business and urban development practices in the abstract, rather than focus on specific experiences or applications. In hindsight I recognise this was as much for my own protection as to shield others from potentially incriminating disclosure.

In that respect this thesis is contrast to those ethnographies where researchers grapple with the concerns of going native whilst at the same time trying to covertly become engaged within the community (e.g., Lugosi, 2006; Mann, 1976). Instead for me the concerns with boundaries lay more in the extent to which the actions that I came to associate with my personal desire to establish a new life in this city seemingly contradicted the easy version of friendship and congeniality that secondary relations in consumption spaces were supposed to offer me (Oldenburg, 1999). That is, I was less concerned that I would lose my identity to the culture I was studying, and more that my research role was putting on public display (imagined?) flaws in an identity in which I had previously felt secure. This again returns to the vulnerability required of, and generated by, autoethnographic research, and I would argue demonstrates the value of this methodology in this context. That is, autoethnography can tell us important things about our desires for belonging, and the ways we may seek these through everyday experiences in public and quasi-public spaces.
Research Limitations

However the potential to delve into the subjectivity of imagined community also highlights autoethnography’s key limitation, its focus on the self. As noted above, autoethnography remains a controversial methodology, primarily because it emphasises subjectivity and emotional responses through personal narratives and researcher introspection and thus is understandably seen to be at odds with more traditional concerns regarding objectivity, generalisation, and theoretical relevance (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Gould, 1995; Mykhalovskiy, 1996; Sparkes, 2002). It has also been criticised as producing research that is self-indulgent, narcissistic, or that has questionable theoretical value (P. Atkinson, 2006; Gans, 1999; Wallendorf & Brucks, 1993).

This thesis is sensitive to that debate, recognising the limitations of drawing primarily on the experience of the researcher and the cautions regarding the potential for the resultant research to be solipsistic when not done well. However I would argue that the theoretical benefits offered in this specific case justify the methodological risk. That is because, as Brann (1991) suggests, one cannot see into another’s imagination, and thus to truly explore the manner in which an individual uses consumption practices and spaces as tools through which to imagine community requires a methodology such as autoethnography. Furthermore, as Mykhalovskiy (1996) argues, criticising autoethnography as self-involved effectively separates the self from the other, obscuring the manner in which the individual is socially constructed. It can also downplay autoethnography’s potential to illustrate how an individual’s experiences can shed light on broader social processes and the experiences of others, a benefit I suggest is particularly relevant when the research focus is everyday experiences within familiar contexts, such as explored within this thesis.

Rather than be concerned regarding the potential for self-indulgence, I would suggest that a more interesting question regarding the possible limitations of autoethnography, in research contexts such as this, could be asked of its relation to reflexivity. That is, to what extent does the type of data collection process described above foreground, or place undue weight on what may have been relatively mundane
consumption experiences, because they are being recalled and analysed? As noted above, it was for this reason that the data collection and analysis processes were separated, to limit the influence of analysis on future actions.

Gould (2011) suggests that over time introspective practices may develop discursive or ritualistic elements. That is, through continual introspection you become more aware of thoughts, feelings and sensations. However, he argues that rather than being problematic, this awareness offers the opportunity to highlight the gaps between introspective memos and extrospective interactions with the world, such that one may become more reflexively aware of the influence of the subconscious, or in this case, the imagination. I suggest that this potential is illustrated within chapter six, where what was initially experienced as a feeling of disappointment comes to be recognised – and experienced as – the combination of unmet hopes and expectations, partially informed by my research interests, and partially based on a incomplete reading of relations in a context that draws significantly on my own earlier life experiences. I explore this potentially circular relationship in more detail in chapter eight, where I consider the relation between my imaginative projections on the nature of community, and my reflexive examination of my experiences and memory traces.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the autoethnographic methodology, specific data collection methods, and procedures of analysis that were undertaken to complete this thesis. As noted above, autoethnography is still seen as a controversial methodology by some, because its use of the experiences of the researcher brings into question the potential for objectivity within qualitative research. However as this chapter has argued it was adopted here because it offers the methodological tools through which to explore the processes of imagining community. In particular this chapter has argued that the focus on subjective aspects of constructing individual and collective identity, through consumption practices and experiences in public and quasi-public spaces, benefits from a methodology that emphasises the reflexive examination of individual experience.
As this chapter has outlined, the data was recorded as research memos, excerpts from which have been included throughout the following chapters. These memos focused on my actions, interactions, and interpretations of my experiences in the public and quasi-public spaces of Northcote, and the streets and pathways that connected them. I categorised data according to the places I frequented and people I discussed, and then analysed these records using typologies of secondary relations and emotions, and according to whether they reflected moments of reflexive or fascinated imagining. Utilising these typologies also assisted in providing structure to the process of analysis, which can be problematic given the dual role as researcher and respondent. In this way the aim of the data collection and analysis process was to systematically follow accepted processes of qualitative data analysis. Finally this chapter has discussed the limitations of autoethnography, which primarily relate to its reliance on a sole research respondent. As this chapter has argued, however, it is also the methodology that was most suited to the research problem of this thesis, and thus as I have argued, a justifiable risk.

The following four chapters describe the findings of this autoethnographic research, each focusing on a different aspect of the process of imagining the presence of neighbourhood-based community through consumption practices and experiences in the public and quasi-public spaces that frame them. Chapter five introduces the empirical work, and provides a useful overview of the findings of the research, which are then considered in chapters six and seven in relation to the ways public and quasi-public spaces may operate as anchoring and exposure realms, as outlined in the literature review. Chapter eight returns to theories of imagining community to provide a summative overview of the thesis research. Due to the decision to complete this thesis by publication, introduction and conclusions have been added to the published chapters to discuss the manner in which each focused paper relates to the broader research questions, and to draw the relevant links between chapters. As is explained in the introduction to chapter five, that paper adopted a theoretical framework of authenticity in direct response to Zukin’s recent publication on urban authenticity (2010). In a paper initially written for a conference on Consumer Culture Theory, and now published as a book chapter, I consider the manner in which I contrast my experiences in one consumption space with the behaviours I observed in another, as I attempted to make sense of these different representations.
as an authentic experience of Northcote. I argue here that my ability to draw on this research data to speak directly to a current issue within urban studies further speaks to the applicability of autoethnographic research.
Chapter Five
Consuming Authentic Neighbourhood: An Autoethnography of Experiencing a Neighbourhood’s New Beginnings and Origins within its Servicescapes

The following chapter was published in 2010 in the 12th volume of Research in Consumer Behavior, edited by Professor Russell Belk from the University of Toronto, and published by Emerald Group Publishing. This edited volume featured a selection of papers chosen from those presented at the 5th annual Consumer Culture Theory Conference, held in Madison, Wisconsin in June 2010. Conference acceptance was based on blind peer reviews of full paper submissions. The submission was accepted for presentation at the conference and publication in the edited volume with limited revisions. This chapter provides an introduction to the findings of the thesis. It discusses how experiences of community are constructed and evaluated through comparisons between different types of interaction and identification across anchoring and exposure realms.

The paper was a direct response to the 2010 publication by Sharon Zukin, Naked City: The death and life of authentic urban places, that introduced theories regarding the ways that assessments of authenticity are made about urban experiences. In this volume Zukin continues her focus on issues of power relations within the urban context, exploring the ways that different cultural groups may make and use assessments of authenticity as a means of claiming power over place. In this respect Zukin’s work speaks to similar issues as those of interest to this thesis: the manner in which identification practices draw on physical, social, and symbolic elements of the urban environment to construct experiences of neighbourhood-based community. In addition, Zukin’s focus on authenticity enabled the adoption of Arnould and Price’s (2000) theories on authenticating acts and authoritative performances, terms they use to describe individual and collective authenticating practices. This theoretical framework was one that was particularly relevant to the Consumer Culture Theory conference for which the chapter was initially written. Together, these theories on
authenticity seemed both a worthwhile and timely framework through which to examine my research data on the potential of consumption practices as a means of constructing experiences of belonging within gentrifying neighbourhoods.

In this respect then, this chapter also offered an opportunity to demonstrate the important interdisciplinary potential of studies of consumption spaces and practices with urban issues. Unfortunately, whilst both urban studies and studies of consumer culture are rich with investigations of the manner in which the physical, social, and symbolic elements of specific public and quasi-public spaces shape our identifications practices, there have been only limited attempts within these two disciplines to consider the manner in which one can inform the other. In particular I argue that research on consumption practices and spaces conducted within the disciplines of marketing and consumer research can add richness to urban studies of gentrification and the manner in which consumption practices shape the identities of such neighbourhoods. Demonstrating the interdisciplinary potential of these theoretical areas was a secondary aim of the chapter. A conclusion that follows the text of the published chapter will expand upon the links between this exploration of urban authenticity, and the questions of the imagined community of this thesis research.

Introduction

The urban environment is a key site of identity-definition for many individuals in contemporary society, and consequently consumption experiences and the urban places in which they occur are a fundamental aspect of contemporary urban living. Because of this, experiencing the urban environment is increasingly associated with consuming it, in that the identity of an urban area becomes an additional value that can be extracted through a consumption experience. Conversely, then, the urban experience is also created through its consumption, such that areas can take on identities associated with the consumption experiences available within them. For individual consumers, this implies that urban identities can become yet another consumable, able to be adopted through everyday and lifestyle consumption experiences within urban servicescapes.
This chapter explores the interplay between consumption and the urban environment within the context of neighbourhood-based community. It shows the way that personal processes of authentication may intersect with perceptions of urban authenticity, and in particular how those processes may relate to experiences of community. To do so it adopts Arnould and Price’s (2000) conceptualisation of authenticating acts and authoritative performances, and considers the implications with regard to Zukin’s (2010) recent theories on the ways that authenticity may be experienced within the urban environment, as new beginnings and origins. It draws on research that investigated the ways that individuals use the opportunities for interaction and identity definition offered by servicescapes for the purposes of constructing and reinforcing place-based community.

The chapter specifically focuses on the autoethnographic component of that project to explore how two neighbourhood servicescapes worked as sites of my individual and collective authentication. It describes how these servicescapes worked to connect this authentication to the neighbourhood’s new beginnings and origins by drawing on the cultural capital of the new urban middle class, and the traditional socialising practices of an older neighbourhood-based demographic. It then also considers the ways that these sites worked cumulatively, to highlight the inauthenticities within my identification practices, which subsequently worked to authenticate a broader connection to the neighbourhood. Firstly, however, a brief review of the literature of authentication is provided, with a focus on the work of Zukin (2010) regarding the urban environment, and Arnould and Price (2000), in relation to consumer identity projects.

**Authenticity**

Authenticity is associated with that which is genuine, real, true or unique. The possibility of experiencing or expressing an authentic identity thus relies on the belief in a ‘true’ inner core that exists apart from all outside influence (Taylor, 1991; Trilling, 1972). However, such claims of purity and separation are difficult to make in contemporary society, because the tools through which we seek to experience and
express authenticity are provided by society (Taylor, 1991). These tools include the products and experiences provided by consumer culture.

Furthermore, authenticity is not only embedded within the social realm, but it is also subjective. This is because assessments of the authenticity of objects or experiences are based on assumptions of perceived essence, rather than actual physical properties (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010). Thus the identity-defining outcome is not reliant on whether the experience really is authentic, but instead on whether the individual interprets it as being so (Arnould & Price, 2000; Beverland & Farrelly, 2010; E. Cohen, 1988). It is this subjective assessment that allows individuals to overlook or downplay the inauthentic elements in many consumption experiences; such as that which exists in the staged authenticity of museums, the contrived nature of reality television programs, and the fleeting connections of consumer communities (e.g., Goulding, 2000; Kozinets, 2002; Rose & Wood, 2005). That is, individuals willingly overlook the inauthentic aspects of an experience, in order to realise the identity benefits that authenticity is deemed to offer.

This chapter is specifically interested in how these quests for authenticity may play out in, and through, the urban environment. For many people cities form the main physical and social context for their authentication practices. However they are also environments that are themselves subject to assessments of authenticity. In particular, the positioning of the city as an experience to be consumed has implications for the manner in which authenticity can be used as a form of cultural power. This concern underlies Zukin’s (2010) recent exploration of urban authenticity, which is summarised in the following section.

**Experiencing authenticity in the urban environment**

The ways that quests for authenticity may be experienced within, and shape the urban environment, is the focus of Zukin’s most recent book, *Naked City: The death and life of authentic urban places* (2010). In this work she considers how understandings of authenticity as creativity or uniqueness, and as tradition or myth, may apply when authenticity is sought through the consumption of urban places and cultures. Drawing on the work of Said (1985), Zukin terms these two expressions of authenticity in the urban context as *new beginnings*, and *origins*. Urban authenticity
experienced as *new beginnings* refers to the distinct features that each cultural group bring to the built and social environment; those that express their particular cultural distinctiveness or moment in time. Authenticity experienced as *origins* refers to features of city that seem to have always existed; its historical and mythical roots. This is authenticity that is acquired through age or patina. Whilst Zukin acknowledges that a city’s constantly shifting identity draws on its origins and new beginnings, her concern is that claims of recognising authenticity can be used as a form of moral superiority, with implications for the look and use of urban places.

In particular, when these claims of authenticity become claims of power, they can work to privilege the cultural capital of certain groups, and disadvantage others. As Zukin suggests, this process is most evident in gentrifying areas. Here the social and cultural preferences that manifest as the new beginnings of the urban middle class are often presented as the model of an authentic urban experience, whilst the historical features of the built environment become an aestheticised version of the area’s origins. This aestheticisation implies distancing, which can depersonalise a neighbourhood’s origins, such that representations of traditional roots through historical buildings are valued over representation through demographic diversity. This aestheticisation can also separate those making claims of authenticity from any commodifying or displacing consequences, because origins are still able to be experienced through the built form. Zukin’s conclusion is that without state intervention, through rent controls, land zoning, and financial incentives for small business, this aestheticisation of origins will continue with significant implications for urban diversity, and for urban authenticity.

This chapter applies Zukin’s categorisations on a more individual level. It investigates the identity-defining behaviours of the author as I attempted to use consumption experiences as a means of connecting to a neighbourhood-based community. Zukin does not explicitly talk about community in her book. However her concerns regarding the loss of diversity in neighbourhoods, as new residents leverage their cultural capital to create new beginnings appears to hinge on an implied shift from collective identifications based on shared place of residence, to those based on shared lifestyle preferences. In this chapter I am interested in the ways that my authentication practices may draw on new beginnings and origins, and
if these experiences reflect Zukin’s concerns regarding the use of cultural capital. Because this research is also interested in place-based community, the implications of Zukin’s categorisations for the ways an individual may experience community are also a focus of this chapter. To do so, this chapter applies Arnould and Price’s (2000) theorisation of the ways authenticity manifests through both individual and collective processes. Their definitions of authenticating acts and authoritative performances are outlined in the following section.

Experiencing authenticity in individual and collective ways

The concepts of authenticity as new beginnings and origins were formulated by Zukin with specific reference to the contemporary urban environment. More broadly however Arnould and Price (2000) suggest that the quest for an authentic self in contemporary society occurs in two ways; as authenticating acts and as authoritative performances. These are individual and collective processes of authentication that utilise the tools of consumer culture as a means of challenging the destabilising processes of postmodernity. This chapter applies these categorisations as a means of considering how authentication practices that draw on the new beginnings and origins of an urban neighbourhood may work in individual and collective ways.

Authenticating acts are self-referential behaviours that construct or reinforce an individual’s sense of self. Such authentication is often associated with experiences that induce flow, peak experience, or peak performance, such as white-water rafting or sky-diving (e.g., Arnould & Price, 1993; Celsi, Rose, & Leigh, 1993). However Arnould and Price (2000) also suggest that authentication may result from an accumulation of experiences with more ordinary products, such as possessions that over time and through use, become intertwined with personal histories (see also Belk, 1988). In the same manner, Denzin (1976) argues that these epiphanic experiences need not only occur from a major upheaval. They can also be the result of an illuminative moment that highlights underlying existential structures; from a reflective moment where the consequences of change are realised; or from an accumulation of experiences which eventually force change. This suggests that ordinary experiences can also constitute that basis for authentication, provided they have not become routinised, typified or fragmented to the extent they are unable to
be disrupted by epiphanic events or synthesised into a broader life narrative (Arnould & Price, 2000).

This broader perspective of personal authentication is in line with that of Caru and Cova (2003, 2007) who argue for a more humble view of the consumption experience that recognises the import of our everyday consumption activities in identity definition. It is also one that is particularly appropriate with regard to the urban environment, because whilst the city clearly offers opportunities for extraordinary experiences, our ordinary consumption activities also significantly shape our urban experiences, and thus our assessments of its authenticity.

Whilst authenticating acts are concerned with individual identity definition, authoritative performances are collective displays, such as festivals and rituals, which are aimed at constructing or reinforcing shared identity and traditions. These performances rely on experiences-in-common, based around stylised invocations of tradition or ritual. In this respect authoritative performances can be associated with the postmodern tribal aesthetic of feeling emotions together (Cova, 1997; Maffesoli, 1996). Neighbourhood festivals and street parades are clear examples of these collective performances (e.g., Sherry, et al., 2007). However the less extraordinary, but still staged authenticity of neighbourhood farmers markets also provide opportunities for collective experiences that reinforce shared identity (e.g., McGrath, et al., 1993; Zukin, 2010).

As with authenticating acts, this chapter suggests these acts of collective authentication can also be more ordinary. This possibility is illustrated through Anderson’s (2006) concept of imagined community. This theory proposes that experiences of community are shaped by cognitive and symbolic structures that are not necessarily underpinned by lived social relations. That is, moments of collective identification can also be inspired by more everyday, but still symbolic actions and experiences, such as the simultaneous activity of people reading the same newspaper. Emphasising this imagined element highlights an important aspect of authoritative performances, in that whilst they may be directed at reinforcing collective identity, they do not necessarily require the physical presence of that collective to be effective. This implies that the collective outcomes may depend as much on our ability to make those imaginative links, by overlooking inauthentic
elements, as they do on the nature or visibility of the performance. This also suggests that assessments of urban authenticity as new beginnings or origins are dependent on which particular collective that imagined link connects one to.

Despite the power of this subjective and imaginative process, authenticating acts and authoritative performances are not interchangeable according to Arnould and Price (2000). That is, authenticating acts cannot successfully reinforce a community connection, nor can authoritative performances establish an individual’s identity as separate from the collective. However, they can be complementary; working in individual and cumulative ways to create a sense of identity (Arnould & Price, 2000). Thus in different ways, each process contributes to our narratives of identity that are both individual, and situated within a social space.

This chapter proposes that this accumulative potential is particularly relevant in an urban environment. This is because our identifications with and attachments to place are constructed over time, and through repeated interactions and experiences, that draw on a myriad of symbolic and cultural cues associated with that place. Of particular interest here is how this cumulative experiencing of authenticity may play out when it is being sought through the consumption of, and within, a specific neighbourhood. Because a neighbourhood is a space where individual and collective authentication and the experiences that construct it may be inextricably intertwined within the extraordinary and the ordinary consumption activities that an individual engages in. The focus of this chapter then is to explore how authenticating acts and authoritative performances may work individually and cumulatively when experienced through servicescapes that represent a neighbourhood’s new beginnings and origins. It will also consider the ways this may shape experiences of neighbourhood-based community and assessments of urban authenticity.

**A Self-narrative Research Methodology**

To examine this process of individual and collective authentication through the urban environment, this chapter draws on an autoethnography conducted in a gentrifying suburb of Melbourne, Australia. This research followed the author’s attempts to use its servicescapes to construct an experience of identification with that
neighbourhood’s community. This project applied theories of postmodern consumer tribes (e.g., Cova, 1997; Cova, et al., 2007; Maffesoli, 1996), proposing that fleeting relations and shared value that are experienced within servicescapes may work to construct an experience of community that is both ephemeral, and yet anchored within a shared identification with place.

The first phase of this research sought to explore this process from the perspective of the individual. It focused on the subjectivity inherent in the experiences of shared value and identity definition in servicescapes and the ways these may become linked as an experience of community. Investigating this subjectivity was deemed important to understand how individuals, businesses, and governing organisations may actively work to facilitate such connections. This is because subjective interpretation is inherent within both the symbolic and imagined aspects of community, and in the consumption experiences that are proposed here as a way of experiencing that shared identity. It is for this reason that an autoethnographic approach was adopted, recording the author’s consumption experiences within the servicescapes of my new neighbourhood for one year.

As a research methodology, autoethnography allows the experience of the individual to be used reflexively to illuminate certain aspects of broader social phenomena (L. Anderson, 2006a; Ellis, 2004; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). In this research it is applied as a means of connecting the personal experience of attempting to identify with a place-based community through consumption experiences, with broader cultural and theoretical ideas of what community represents. However because autoethnography is also embedded within the process of constructing a narrative of self-identity (Ellis, 2004; Ellis & Bochner, 2000), this project presents a unique opportunity to examine how authenticity may be experienced by an individual within the urban environment and in relation to place-based community. This is because I was not only interested in establishing an identity as part of a neighbourhood-based community for research purposes, but as a new resident to Melbourne I also sought to establish a sense of my identity, utilising the tools of the new physical and social space in which I found myself. That is, I was seeking to authenticate my sense of self, as well as experience that self in relation to the collective identity of my neighbourhood.
Data collection and analysis

Data collection took the form of extensive memo writing, as recommended by Ellis (2004), with over 150 pages of field notes recorded on just over 100 different servicescape based consumption experiences, from September 2008 to September 2009. These memos focused on recording which servicescapes I frequented, and my actions within those locations. They also recorded the nature and general content of the conversations I had with staff and customers, and the way those interactions made me feel and act. A third focus of these memos was the assumptions and associations I made between servicescapes and people, both as individuals and collectively. That is, whilst the majority of my data records my actions within servicescapes, the places I did not go and the things I thought about but did not do were also an important component. Each memo can thus be thought of as an episode in the ongoing narrative of me trying to determine the neighbourhood’s identity, and my relation to it.

The data analysis has focused on the interplay between these servicescape based interactions, my emotional responses, the experienced value, and the identity attributions recorded within my research notes. Statements about identity were considered from the perspective of whether I was making statements about my own identity or the identity of others (both people and places), and the means through which that identity was expressed. These identity statements were then categorised utilising Richins’ (1997) descriptors of emotions experienced through consumption and Holbrook’s (1999) consumer value typology. This allowed for the investigation of emotional responses in combination with value experiences, and the consideration of how they may combine during individual and collective consumption experiences. Whilst it may be expected that authentication would primarily result through value experiences that have positive emotional impacts, this analysis highlighted the relation between negative value experiences and emotional responses, and the tendency to overlook inauthenticity to achieve the desired identity benefits, as discussed within the literature review.

Statements that specifically related to people were also coded according to the type of interaction they most represented. To do so, Lofland’s (1998) differentiation of the types of secondary relations that may occur in public space was applied. She
defines these as fleeting, routinised, quasi-primary and intimate-secondary, with shifts in the relational types occurring as information is exchanged between parties and emotional impact increases. In particular, quasi-primary relations describe the brief moments of shared experience of the tribal aesthetic, whereas intimate-secondary are the relations of acquaintances. It would be expected then that both relational types would feature within authentication processes, with the shift from quasi-primary to intimate-secondary reflecting a shift from collective to individual value experiences as relations become more personal. This manner of categorisation allowed me to structure the data in ways so as to track these relational changes and then relate them to value experiences and emotional responses.

What this analysis has most clearly indicated is the extent to which personal and collective identification is intertwined, particularly when both are being acted out within a broader narrative of attempting to establish a place-based identity. It also highlighted the extent to which the desired outcomes guiding such interactions may only become apparent upon reflection, or when consumption experiences work as epiphanic moments that highlight hidden motives in past activities. In particular the contrast between the emotions experienced across the two locations focused on here illustrated the extent to which experiences of inauthenticity inform future authentication practices. As these locations also represented the neighbourhood’s new beginnings and origins, this interplay between authentic and inauthentic experiences had implications for my broader assessments of the authenticity of my neighbourhood. The particular features of these two locations are described in the following section.

**The research sites**

This chapter focuses on my experiences within two of the neighbourhood’s servicescapes, a bar, and the local shopping centre. These sites were chosen because they are the key locations of my lifestyle and everyday consumption activities; they are also sites that I have identified to others as important to my developing place-based identity, as the follow excerpt indicates.

>[Acquaintance] asked me if I’d been hanging out at [the Plaza] doing fieldwork, if I still liked it. Which I said I did, ‘cause all the old folk
hang out there, but really I’d been hanging out at [the Bar] doing fieldwork, meeting all the [neighbourhood] weird people’. He kind of laughed, in a way that implied he had a certain opinion of [the Bar], although I’m not sure what it is. He had mentioned the place to me before, I guess it could be seen as yuppie or exclusive in one way. And I had identified myself with it. (Research notes, 8th February, 2009)

The Bar exemplifies Zukin’s category of new beginnings, it also operates as a third place or anchoring place (Aubert-Gamet & Cova, 1999; Oldenburg, 1999). Here I interact with a neighbourhood-based network of my socio-cultural peers whilst also expressing and reinforcing personal identity preferences. The Plaza is the local shopping centre, built in 1981 on an abandoned industrial site. This relatively ordinary space has been co-opted in ways that illustrate the neighbourhood’s origins, both as an ethnic, and lower socio-economic area. The area’s elderly residents in particular use its public spaces in the manner of a real plaza, or traditional main street. In this way it also operates as a place of exposure (Aubert-Gamet & Cova, 1999) by displaying the diversity and social practices of a broader cross-section of the neighbourhood’s residents. In this respect the Plaza represents what Zukin describes as a social understanding of origins, in that it provides a place in which the neighbourhood’s historical roots are on display.

Both places have contributed to my understanding of the neighbourhood’s identity, and shape the way that I relate to any communities that I associate with it. These sites thus play key roles in my perception and evaluation of the authenticity of the urban experience that my neighbourhood offers. The following sections provide a brief description of these servicescapes and then discuss my authenticating experiences within them. Each description firstly focuses on the relationship I developed with the servicescape, and then considers the ways this worked as a process of authentication. The final section considers how these separate places of authentication worked together to inform a broader identification with place and with neighbourhood-based community.
Experiencing New Beginnings in the Bar

The Bar opened in late 2007, in what was previously a shoe shop. They kept the name, and a photograph of the previous proprietor above the bar; however beyond those limited nods to history, this small wine bar exemplifies the gentrifying new beginnings of the area. Whilst the Bar can be busy, it is rarely overwhelmingly so. Indeed it was initially described to me as a good venue to go with friends if you wanted to talk, rather than as a location in which to interact with strangers. The Bar is situated on the Main Street of the neighbourhood, surrounded by cafes and restaurants, independent clothing stores, bookshops and other bars. This street is the neighbourhood’s entertainment and lifestyle precinct, and its new beginnings writ large.

The Bar as a third place

The Bar differentiates itself from the six other bars in the Main Street through music selection, service approach, product offering and servicescape layout, so as to target a specific niche of the larger resident demographic that could be described as new urban middle class. This value offering is built on a service gap identified by the owners based on their personal lifestyle preferences, which is a practice Zukin identifies as common with sites of new beginnings. The three owners maintain an obvious presence, with at least one of them working most nights. Their presence has a significant influence on the atmosphere and customer service approach of the bar. This was aptly summarised in the query of an acquaintance; “is that the bar where the bartenders are more interested in putting on records and dancing than they are in serving customers?” Ah, yes.

Whilst acknowledging the truth in that person’s assessment, my defence of the bar owners and staff, “the service is better when they know you”, illustrates my relationship with this servicescape; it has become my third place (Oldenburg, 1999). These are quasi-public spaces that allow for an experience of communal gathering that is inclusive and sociable, yet are not bound by the commitments of primary relations (Oldenburg, 1999). These sites are familiar in popular culture as the corner shop or local pub where ‘everybody knows your name’, and as such third places are
often presented as open, friendly places in which individuals can freely interact and connect. However this assumption of openness simplifies the constraints that can surround secondary relations in public places, including social norms, and the physical elements of servicescape layout. Lofland (1998) in particular argues that such locations more often operate as parochial realms, where meaningful interaction is limited to those who are accepted as regulars or within specific social networks. In this more closed form, third places are similar to what Aubert-Gamet and Cova (1999) call anchoring places; servicescapes in which communities come together to reinforce their relationships and identity through ritualised and symbolic practices.

These physical and social constraints are evident within the Bar. It operates as an anchoring place for a neighbourhood-based social network, which can co-opt certain sections of the servicescape in parochial ways. This potentially exclusionary practice is assisted by a layout that segments the venue, and can limit interaction between customers to brief encounters at the bar, or in the passage way. Like many bars, this means that the small seating area at the bar is the most conducive to secondary relations, and it was from this position that much of my interacting took place. One consequence of this seating arrangement is that much of my attention was directed towards the Bar’s owners and staff. More generally this layout also limits the potential of the servicescape to operate as a site of collective identification. This is because sitting at the bar encourages a one to one focus, and separates those at the bar from the interaction occurring in the booths and passage way behind them. This seating arrangement had implications for the connections I was able to develop, as will be discussed in the following section.

**Constructing a personal new beginning in a third place**

My third place relationship with the Bar has developed over time. I am what Katovich and Reese (1987) describe as an irregular regular; my patronage is infrequent, but I still have a regular’s expectation of a certain level of interaction and recognition. This customer identity has developed as an initial identification with the excellence of product and the aesthetics of the servicescape design has grown over time into a deeper attachment to people and place. This shift has resulted from an accumulation of shared experiences and the value they represent. This includes the
playful appreciation of music, and involvement in its selection; the status, esteem, and play experienced through personal greetings, meetings with other regulars and shared conversations over the bar. That is, value experiences based on materiality were superseded by those with relational value, as the routinised and quasi-primary relations between myself and the Bar’s owners, staff, and other regular customers evolved into intimate-secondary relations. The beginning of this shift is evident in the following excerpt:

Much happier with [the Bar] lately, I was there on Thursday, and again tonight, and staff … they’ve been attentive, on Thu night definitely. Well I felt like they could see my pain and they kept on checking on the volume of wine in my glass. And he [owner 1] said goodbye to me when I left, and he said goodbye to me again tonight, which is just is one of those things I’ve been watching out for. And this evening I went for a glass and stayed for three because actually I was quite liking it. I was just reading the paper and randomly looking about and talking a little bit to the dude who was sitting next to me and to the bar staff. And I guess that was the first time I’ve chatted with them generally. And [owner 1] gave me some olives, as a freebie, which I guess is perhaps the first sign of some level of recognition of being some - local, regular…So I’ll need to definitely go to [the Bar] a lot more now. It’s becoming more what I thought it should be. (Research notes, 6th December 2008)

However, the development of my relationship with the Bar and the people associated with has not been as easy Oldenburg’s recommendation that “one simply keeps reappearing and tries not to be obnoxious” (1999, p. 35) would suggest. My expectations of recognition and the emotional value I came to attach to this servicescape, did not always match my experiences within it. For example, it took another four visits spread over seven weeks before I managed to learn Owner 1’s name, after eventually asking another customer. It then took another two visits over four weeks before I was able to tell them mine.Whilst the time frame is not surprising given the infrequency of my patronage, the extent of my emotional investment in this simple act of introduction was. Indeed my research notes over this
period suggest that discontent, embarrassment, and feelings of being ignored or out of place, are as much a feature of my reflections of my interactions in that place as are joy, excitement, and a feeling of connection, as the following excerpt suggests.

Thinking about tonight and [owner 2] and [staff member] and introductions and realising I feel a bit let down/disappointed about the lack of something from them. But I realise also that is because I am wanting something more from them than the superficial I keep on going on about. I want recognition, as a person worth knowing. And that is perhaps were the thing of doing it by yourself falls down. I have an emotional investment in it. (Research notes, 2nd February 2009)

The intensity of this emotional response can be linked to confusion between authenticating and authoritative aims. In fact, whilst I originally viewed the Bar as a means of establishing connections to a neighbourhood-based collective, my research notes illustrate that much of my energy was directed to establishing more personal connections to the owners and staff. These aims are not mutually exclusive; previous research has highlighted that owners and staff play important roles as gatekeepers and bridging ties to the social networks that operate within their servicescapes (e.g., Rosenbaum, 2007; Spradley & Mann, 1975). However my desire for personal authentication and the personal emotional conflict it caused would seem to be somewhat at odds with the mythology of the third place as a place of easy sociality. This is because whilst my experiences in the Bar were clearly social, they were rarely collective. They instead hinged on one to one interactions that were directed at affirming my membership of a cultural group with whom such consumption practices and locations are associated. That is, I was using my third place identification with the Bar as a means of authenticating my personal new beginning.

It is worth noting that only two weeks later a brief stop for a glass of wine turned into a long revelatory evening in the company of the two owners referenced in these quotes. That is, my uncertainty was soon relieved by an experience that reinforced my status as a “person worth knowing”. However this subsequent experience of authentication did not significantly alter the underlying secondary nature of my relationship with the Bar owners, and had little bearing on my relations with other...
regular customers. Nor did it prevent future moments of self-doubt. Indeed my research notes, and experiences, continue to reinforce the superficial nature of this authenticating act and its need for ongoing reinforcement. This reinforcement is necessary to overcome the conflict between my desire to identify the Bar as a site of collective identification, and the personal focus of my authenticating practices.

(In)Authenticities and new beginnings

The Bar then not only exemplifies the new beginnings of the neighbourhood, but also my personal new beginning. I used the symbolic value embedded within the Bar, its association with the neighbourhood’s new beginnings, and with a specific cultural group, as tools within that authentication process. Essentially I was drawing on the cultural capital invested in the types of consumption practices and spaces the urban middle class use to authenticate claims of new beginnings to establish my membership of that cultural group. As part of this process I also sought to establish intimate-secondary relations with the Bar’s owners and staff, in an attempt to embed myself within a social network, and as means of performing that broader collective identification. Thus whilst this bar now operates as my third place, a location in which I have constructed, and reinforce the intimate-secondary relations that are anchored there, it only became so once I was able to establish for myself an authentic sense of who I was within that place. My attachment to and identification with the Bar, and the people with whom I interact when within it, primarily serves to reinforce my belief in my neighbourhood as a place in which I can express that authentic self.

To do so however, I must overlook a number of inauthentic aspects of my construction of the Bar as a third place. This includes the contradiction between the positive mythology of the third place, and the many negative aspects of my relational practices. In particular, my emotional need for personal recognition through intimate-secondary relations undermined the possibility that this site may work to connect me to a broader neighbourhood-based collective. Instead as I authenticate my personal new beginning, by becoming friends with the Bar owners, I also reinforce the collective use of this cultural capital of new beginnings as a means of representing a certain model urban authenticity. In this respect, my experiences of
authentication within the Bar would appear to support Zukin’s conceptualisation of new beginnings, suggesting that they are primarily about individual authentication through the cultural capital of the new urban middle classes. However the moments of disruption that my negative experiences represent also highlight the limitations of this authentication within a neighbourhood context. This is because when I am questioning my own identifications, I am also recognising that these new beginnings offer only a partial expression of both the identity of my neighbourhood, and of my identification with it. This partial expression is made more apparent when my experiences in the Bar are contrast with those in the Plaza, which is described in the following section.

**Experiencing Origins in the Plaza**

The second site of interest here is the local shopping centre, the Plaza, built in 1981 on an old industrial site. This shopping centre primarily services neighbourhood residents for everyday shopping purposes. It is not a destination mall. It contains two supermarkets, a discount department store, and full range of other food and retail stores including bakeries, chemists, a newsagent, butcher, health food store, travel agent, pet shop, takeaway food outlets, electronics store, plus some low cost clothing and homewares stores, and generic ‘$2’ junk shops. Some of these stores are major retail brands. Many are non-descript small businesses that are not identifiably independent or locally owned. They are ordinary shops.

The Plaza is well patronised; on Saturdays, or when it is raining, cold, or hot, the centre is bustling, often in stark contrast to the quiet Main Street just beyond it. For this pulling power the Plaza is often disparaged; by the new beginnings Main Street traders, or individuals who appear to subscribe to an ethic of supporting small business and primarily associate the Plaza with the supermarkets that anchor it. As is common with shopping centres, it does appear to have had an impact on the retail offerings of the Main Street, concentrating everyday shopping amenities within its walls, and essentially creating a separation between the ordinary and lifestyle shopping areas of the neighbourhood.

*The Plaza as an exposure place*
In line with this separation, the Plaza is a site in which I mainly engage in mundane or everyday shopping activities, such as buying groceries. I also use it as a short cut on my way to the Main Street; it thus forms a part of my neighbourhood round. For me, the value offered by the Plaza is mostly one of efficiency. It offers convenient access to a broad range of essential products and services that I use to supplement my ethical preferences of supporting small business. It also offers a climate controlled route from my house to the lifestyle areas of the suburb and beyond.

However, as an ordinary shopping space, the Plaza is also the most diverse servicescape within the neighbourhood, offering a range of products and services that appeal to, or at least would be required by, most residents within the area. It is effectively a place in which everyone ends up at some stage, and thus presents opportunities for what might be called ordinary authoritative performances, through quasi-primary encounters with other residents. My growing awareness of this potential is evident within my research notes. I moved from references to the Plaza as a non-place (Auge, 1995), with no real identity-defining value for me, to the recognition of its social role in the lives of other residents, and an increased expectation that it may offer me similar experiences. This shifting perception and its impact with regard to my sense of neighbourhood-based identity is illustrated in the following research note excerpt.

I don’t really see [the Plaza] as a place of sociality – for me. I see lots of other people engaging in interaction there, particularly the old Greek men, but also people running into each other, and I have even seen [neighbour] and [hairdresser] there once. But in reality I don’t expect to see people or have the potential for recognition experiences there, despite the fact it is the most certain place where people will be eventually and also most likely to mark a person as being from the local area. I just don’t expect it from a shopping mall – with relation to my demographic.

But today I saw both [resident familiar from the Bar] and the guy from [cafe staff member]. Neither of them recognised me. … Neither of those experiences were particularly exciting, and didn’t do anything for the ‘being recognised thing’ but did make me think
about, have I been here long enough that I’m starting to run into people in the supermarket? Maybe I am becoming local after all?

(Research notes, 4th March 2009)

Unlike the Bar however, the hope of intimate-secondary interaction is not the key driver of my authentication practices in the Plaza. Instead it is primarily a place in which I observe and appreciate the consumption practices and associated sociality of other neighbourhood residents, in particular an older generation of men and women who use the shopping centre’s public spaces as their third place. As with my consumption experiences within the Bar, this appreciation draws on a range of experienced value to which meaning is attributed in a comparative and accumulative process. This appreciation takes on spiritual qualities; it is intrinsic, reactive, and other-oriented, and overrides my more generalised dislike for shopping centres as a whole. As Zukin suggests, I also use my appreciation of the Plaza to affirm my moral or ethical superiority over those who disparage its ordinariness. Significantly though these claims are directed at those within my cultural group whom I see as being unable to look beyond the mundane nature of the shops and mass market implications of the supermarket, to appreciate the ways that Plaza’s spaces appeal to a broad range of neighbourhood residents. This ethical stance is reinforced through occasional playful quasi-primary interactions with some of the Plaza regulars, which further serves to reinforce my impression of its open and inclusive sociality.

Most significantly however, I use my appreciation of the Plaza as a social space to affirm my identification with the broader neighbourhood community. That is, my exposure to the anchoring practices of a different cultural group works in the manner of the simultaneous actions of an imagined community. In seeing others act out what I strive so hard to achieve in the Bar; I recognise the possibility of a shared link.

Thus my experiences in the Plaza are in some ways epiphanic, highlighting the extent to which my experiences in the Bar are primarily aimed at self-authentication, whilst suggesting a different pathway to collective identification.

Attachment and authentication at the plaza

The combination of efficiency, play, my spiritual and ethical response to the Plaza’s social value for others, and the recognition of the shared authentication practices that
are bound up in that sociality, has worked to create a sense of attachment to my local shopping centre. This is clearly indicated in the research note excerpt below.

[The Plaza] is clearly a contributor to the place-identity of [suburb] – in as much because some people dislike it and thus react against it ... But it also contributes to my identity within this place. My appreciation for what [the Plaza] offers some people is an example of that, given I would have previously put myself in the anti-shopping centre box. I kind of like [the Plaza], and seeing all the old guys use it the way they do makes me smile. I shop there and am not ashamed by it. Certainly I maintain the same usage patterns regarding the supermarket – but I can separate what [the Plaza] is as a place from what Coles is. I think if I did move down the hill, so that [the Plaza] was no longer on my path to other places, that I would miss it a little bit. Miss seeing its sociality anyway. (Research notes, 26th March 2009)

This sense of attachment to the Plaza, and in particular to its role as an exposure place, illustrates the ways that authenticating acts and authoritative performances can work in complementary and cumulative ways. My assessments of its value have moved from being of no identity-defining value, to a hope of the possibility of meaningful interaction, to authenticating statements, to concern at the potential loss of it as a place in which to regularly witness and engage in authoritative performances. Furthermore, it was the realisation of the potential for interaction with members of my cultural group, reinforced through an authenticating appreciation of the sociality of others, which illustrated the potential of broader authenticating performances. That is, one that linked me to neighbourhood residents outside the limited cultural group with whom I interact in the Bar and other places of new beginnings. Significantly this recognition of a shared identification with a broader demographic worked to further highlight the inauthenticities in the identity of new beginnings I authenticate within the Bar. That is, I have used my identification with a Plaza-based collective as a way to differentiate myself from assumed cultural practices of a more restricted socio-cultural based collective. In my appreciation of
the Plaza I individuate myself from those I sought to identify with when in the Bar, as a means of remedying some of the insecurities I experience in that location.

**Distancing and exposure in a site of origins**

The Plaza’s role as a space of exposure is fundamental to this comparative process. As an exposure site it displays the neighbourhood’s roots through the ordinary shopping practices of a broad range of residents. In this way the Plaza works as a levelling place, reducing cultural and demographic differences to one of shared geography and shopping practices. Whilst this effectively reduces the strength of the potential link between individuals, because rituals and traditions need to be broadly recognisable, it increases its potential breadth, ensuring these aspects of the neighbourhood’s history continue to be performed. In this case, the relational practices of the older residents who are co-opting the Plaza’s spaces highlights the extent to which my new beginning, expressing authenticity through social interaction in third places, is merely the continuation of the practices of original residents. Thus my collective authentication within the Plaza draws on my individual authentication within the Bar, to reinforce the authenticity of my neighbourhood, as a place in which traditions can be continued, across different servicescapes, and demographics. However, whilst my appreciation of the social opportunities the Plaza offers diverse residents may have value to me in confirming a connection to the area’s broader community, it also involves an element of distancing against which Zukin warns in her discussion of the aestheticisation of authenticity as origins. The appreciative stance I adopt toward the sociality of others is taken from the safety of my ordinary shopping practices, which offer me a position from which to observe, but only superficially engage with others. This distancing though is in effect a requirement of the function of an exposure place, and I suggest that it is this element of distancing that allows me to compare my experiences of authenticity and consider their cumulative impact. This is because this distancing reduces the emotional impact of my relational activities in the Plaza, and thus leaves me more open to experiencing the collective identification of a neighbourhood-based community.

What is significant with regard to Zukin’s concerns however is that this emotional distancing does not prevent the development of attachment. Indeed I would suggest
it played a key role in facilitating it. This may in part be a response to the social ways in which origins are expressed in this location, that is, the Plaza’s is more than a physical expression of the neighbourhood’s history. However, this attachment goes beyond an appreciation of social practices, it is embedded within the Plaza’s physical spaces. It shapes my usage patterns and my adoption of it as site of authentication. Furthermore, despite the distancing, and the claims of recognising authenticity that can accompany it, my attachment to this ordinary shopping space works as a representation of my attachment to my neighbourhood. Indeed it is mostly through this ordinary space that my attachment to and identification with my neighbourhood is expressed.

**Individual and Collective Authentication Through New Beginnings and Origins**

At the heart of the research that inspired this chapter is a concern regarding the interplay between consumption practices and neighbourhood-based community. This is also a key concern in Zukin’s recent work on authenticity within the urban environment. In effect we are both interested in the ways that the consumption spaces of the urban environment can offer individuals a means through which to effectively express their desire for individuality and for collective identification. This chapter considered these concerns through the rubric of authenticating acts and authoritative performances as defined by Arnould and Price, by drawing on autoethnographic data of my experiences within two neighbourhood servicescapes; the Bar and the Plaza.

The Bar is a place of new beginnings for both the neighbourhood and myself. Whilst it operates as a third place for me, and an anchoring place for others, it is primarily a place in which I authenticate my personal new beginnings by associating them with the consumption preferences and social practices of a specific cultural group. The Plaza meanwhile has been coopted by older residents as a social space that displays the neighbourhood’s diversity and origins. It works as an anchoring place for this cultural group, however for me it takes on the role of a place of exposure. Here I can observe, and engage with that community’s authoritative performances from the safety of my ordinary shopping behaviours. The Plaza also works as a place where
some of the insecurity suggested in my struggles for recognition within the Bar, are remedied. I use my appreciation of its value as an anchoring place for others, as a means to reassert my moral credibility to myself, with reference to what I see as the less appreciative attitudes of my peers. That is, my desire for individual authentication in one highlights the possibility for collective authentication in the other.

This interplay of identity definition across these two servicescapes highlights the cumulative nature of authentication practices and the complicated ways they can work together in the construction of a place-based identity. I only began to see the identity defining value of the Plaza, when I recognised the value it offered others. Furthermore, my attachment to the Plaza that developed out of this recognition of value worked to highlight the narrowness of my authentications in the Bar. In both locations I must overlook inauthenticities so as to achieve the individual or collective authentication I desire, such as my failed attempts at personal recognition in the Bar, and the aesthetic distancing that prevents my complete collective engagement in the Plaza. However when considered cumulatively these locations also offer opportunities to remedy these inauthenticities through their complementary nature; the Bar offers opportunities to establish my identity with reference to a cultural group, and the Plaza allows me to experience a less emotionally taxing collective authentication. Importantly these separate individual and collective experiences also work to authenticate a broader identification with my neighbourhood that is reinforced through the link of our shared social practices, whether lived out in sites of new beginnings or origins.

The interplay between my authenticating practices in these two locations and the relational activities also speaks to aspects of the postmodern approach to place-based community that underlies this research. If sites of new beginnings work primarily to reinforce individual identity by operating as third places, and sites of origins work as exposure places to demonstrate broader connections to a collective, then it could be suggested that the latter are more significant with regard to constructing a place-based postmodern community. However the rituals being performed in the Plaza take on much of their collective meaning when they are contrast to the more individual identification practices of the Bar. That is, the Plaza’s exposure role only
became apparent in contrast to my attempts to anchor within the Bar. This reinforces the importance of both anchoring and exposure sites within neighbourhoods, and the opportunities for individual and collective authentication that they offer. It also suggests the importance of sites of origins taking on that exposure role, because they are by their nature more inclusive than the anchoring sites of new beginnings.

In effect this conclusion returns to Zukin’s concerns regarding urban authenticity, suggesting that the loss of a social understanding of origins, and spaces in which this can be experienced, can limit our understanding of urban authenticity overall. However it also illustrates how individual authentication within sites of new beginnings provides an important contrast against which this experience of origins can be defined. Whilst this reconfirms that urban identities cannot be reduced to individual experiences in servicescapes, my experience also suggests that individual authentication practices will also not tolerate such narrow urban identifications.

Whilst authenticating acts that are anchored in sites of new beginnings and draw on the cultural capital of the new urban middle class are unlikely to lead to social change, I would also argue that this authenticating potential relies on comparative experiences, such as offered by sites of origins. This chapter also suggests that the exposure places that can provide a space for such experiences do not necessarily need to be themselves a representation of those origins. Instead they may be ordinary shopping spaces that allow for traditions and rituals to be performed in tandem with everyday practices. This final point may be significant in gentrifying neighbourhoods, because despite their tendency toward lifestyle consumption spaces, they generally retain their more ordinary offerings, such as supermarkets and local shopping centres. Thus whilst Zukin proposes that the pervasive nature of experienced-based consumer culture means that only state intervention can address this inevitability, I am more hopeful for the potential of individuals to affect change through their consumption practices.
Chapter Five Conclusion: Relating authentication to imagination and multiplicity

As noted above, this book chapter sought to respond to specific issues raised in Zukin’s recent publication on urban authenticity. It was also written for an academic audience familiar with issues of consumption, their relation to identity construction, and the important role of physical and symbolic elements within that process; accordingly, it drew on literature on authentication, consumer value, and servicescapes that is published within that disciplinary area. Thus whilst the chapter adopted a theoretical framework of authenticity, I remained focused on the manner in which the physical, social, and symbolic elements of public and quasi-public spaces can support individual and collective identification within the urban context.

In doing so the chapter speaks to both research questions of this thesis: how do individuals’ consumption practices work to construct an imagined presence of neighbourhood-based community, and how do experiences in the public and quasi-public spaces that frame those practices contribute to the construction of that imagined presence? This final section draws out these contributions.

This chapter highlights parallels between authenticating acts, authoritative performances, and the imagining of community. This includes the importance of individual identification within the determination of the collective, the need for ongoing reinforcement of those collective identifications, and the requirement of overlooking invalidating information so as to maintain the construction of the collective, all of which I suggest reflect the interplay between the critical and fascinated processes of the imagination. Thus, for example when imagining my experiences within the Bar or the Plaza as representative of individual and collective authentication, I overlooked inconsistencies so as to construct contiguous equivalence in the form of a shared practice, in the manner in which one imagines oneself to be part of a community. Furthermore, as I made these comparisons between the imagined community, and my experiences in the Bar, I was able to adopt a reflexive awareness of the extent to which this anchoring relied on a fascinated conception of a collective that required ongoing reinforcement so as to maintain the experience of belonging that it offered. In this respect then I argue that
this chapter can be read as an overview of my process of imagining myself into a community, and the means through which I embedded meaning into consumption experiences so as to construct its shared practices.

It is also possible to draw parallels between Zukin’s concepts of origins and new beginnings, and theories of the multiplicity of the contemporary city as discussed within the literature review (e.g., Amin, 2008; Amin & Thrift, 2002). Zukin is particularly interested in issues of power relations as they play out through different cultures within cities. Across her research she has focused on issues of gentrification and consumption, and the manner in which individuals, cultural groups, and organisations can intentionally and unwittingly use these practices in ways that constrain others (e.g., Zukin, 1995, 1998). In Naked City, the text discussed here, Zukin does not directly address theories of the multiplicity of the urban experience. However, her emphasis on the subjectivity within assessments of authenticity, the manner in which they draw on non-human elements of the urban context, and also objectify people in the process of making those assessments, nonetheless reflect the emphasis of theorists such as Amin, Massey and Urry on the importance of objects in our determinations of placed-based meanings.

In that respect I argue it is possible to suggest that assessments of authenticity as new beginnings and origins reflect different constructions of stories so far that are dependent on the trajectories from which they are negotiated (Massey, 2005). And in recognising this it is also possible to consider the manner in which these assessments may combine, or alter, as the meaning attached to these trajectories shift over time. I suggest this is clearly demonstrated with the example of the Plaza, which comes to be understood as a representation of both social origins, as well as an earlier generation’s new beginning. That is, these assessments of authenticity are not fixed, and thus offer potential in their reinterpretation. This is important because it is through these shifting orientations that we see the beginning of the construction of the imagined presence of community, described in this chapter as the recognition of shared anchoring practices.

Finally, this chapter provides insight into the manner in which public and quasi-public spaces operating as anchoring and exposure realms work cumulatively in the construction of the imagined presence of neighbourhood-based community. As will
be discussed throughout the thesis, this interrelation between anchoring and exposure is seen as a fundamental element of imagining community, because it supports the comparative processes of the critical and fascinated imagination. As this chapter also highlights, the manner in which these realms support different kinds of identification can also be seen to assist in the construction of a place-based identity despite the fragmented or unfixed nature of the context. That is, these varying identification practices can draw out the diversity of potential objects and shared practices of an imagined community, and begin to construct the link that binds them as an imagined presence. In that respect, this chapter assists in contextualising the more focused exploration of anchoring and exposure in chapters six and seven. The following chapter more closely considers the anchoring realm by focusing on my experiences of becoming a regular in the bar discussed above.
Chapter Six
Anchoring and Exposing in the Third Place: Regular Identification at the Boundaries of Social Realms

This journal article was published in October 2011 in the Zone edition of *M/C* Journal, volume 14 issue 5, edited by Professor Greg Hearn and myself. M/C Journal publishes short papers through online open access, with the intention that they be accessible to an audience beyond the author’s specific academic discipline. The aim of this edition was to explore the concept of zones, and the ways that these physical, social, and metaphorical spaces shape our individual and collective experiences, movements, and beliefs. This article was accepted for publication through a blind peer review process, with Professor Hearn acting as supervising editor. The journal article is available at [http://journal.media-culture.org.au/index.php/mcj/article/view/422](http://journal.media-culture.org.au/index.php/mcj/article/view/422).

In this paper I chose to specifically focus on the issue of third places. These are those consumption spaces that are commonly represented in television soap operas and place marketing as a space of informal sociality where ‘everybody knows your name.’ In the literature review, these types of consumption spaces were discussed as anchoring realms, and explored for their potential to support experiences of belonging to specific social or cultural groups. These experiences draw extensively on the interaction that occurs within them, yet are also supported by the physical and symbolic elements of these spaces. However, academic literature also questions the openness of such spaces, and highlights their potential to separate cultural groups according to their consumption preferences. The paper therefore sought to offer an investigation of the ways third places may operate in the contemporary city that would speak to both theory and popular representations by exploring my own experiences of becoming a regular within a bar in my neighbourhood. Additional conclusions regarding the manner in which this third place identification contributed to my imaginings of community are explored in a chapter conclusion that follows the journal article text.
I was at Harry’s last night, ostensibly for a quick glass of wine. Instead it turned into a few over many hours and a rare experience of the ‘regular identity’. It was relatively quiet when I arrived and none of the owners were there. David [a regular] was DJing; we only vaguely acknowledged each other. He was playing great music though, and I was enjoying being there by myself for the first time in a while – looking about at other customers and trying to categorise them, and occasionally chatting to the girl next to me. My friend Angie came to join me about an hour later, and then Paul, a regular, arrived. He sat on my other side and alternated between talking to me, David [they are close friends], the staff, and other customers he knew who passed by.

As the evening progressed a few more regulars arrived; the most unconnected regulars I can recall seeing at one time. We were sitting along the bar, making jokes about whether the manager for the evening would let us have a lock in. None of us thought so, however the joking seemed to engender a shared identity – that we were a collective of regulars, with specialised knowledge and expectations of privileges. Perhaps it only arose because we were faced with the possibility of having those privileges refused. Or because just for once there were more than one or two of us present. Evenings like that put the effort and pain of the work I put into gaining that identity into context. (Research note, 18th June 2011)

**Being a Harry’s Regular**

Harry’s is my favourite bar in my neighbourhood. It is a small wine bar, owned by three men in their late thirties and targeted at people like them; my gentrifying inner city neighbourhood’s 20 to 40 something urban middle class. Harry’s has seats along the bar, booths inside, and a courtyard out the back. The seating arrangements mean...
that larger groups tend to gather outside, groups of two to four spread around the location, and people by themselves, or in groups of two, tend to sit at the bar. I usually sit at the bar.

Over the three or so years I’ve been patronising Harry’s I’ve developed quite an attachment to the place. It is somewhere I feel comfortable and secure, where I have met and continue to run into other neighbourhood residents, and that I approach with an openness as to how the evening may play out. The development of this attachment and sense of ease has been a cumulative process. The combination of a slow growing familiarity punctuated by particularly memorable evenings, such as the one described above, where heightened emotions coalesce into a reflexive recognition of identification and belonging. As a result I would describe myself as an irregular regular (Katovich & Reese, 1987). This is because whilst my patronage is sporadic, I have a regular’s expectation of recognition, as well as an awareness of the privileges and responsibilities that this identification brings.

Similar processes of identification and attachment have been described in earlier ethnographic work on regulars within bars and cafes. These have described the ways that group identifications and broader cultural roles are continually renegotiated and reinforced through social interaction, and how physical and symbolic tools, such as business layout and décor, acquired knowledge, as well as non-regulars, are utilised in this process (E. Anderson, 1978; Katovich & Reese, 1987; Spradley & Mann, 1975). However the continuing shifts in the manner in which consumption practices shape our experiences of the urban environment (e.g., Lloyd, 2006; Zukin, 1998, 2010), and of collective identification (e.g., Cova, et al., 2007), suggest that ongoing investigation in this area would be fruitful. Accordingly, this paper extends this earlier work to consider the ways this kind of regular collective identification may manifest within consumption spaces in the contemporary Western inner city.

In particular this research is interested in the implications for regular identification of the urban middle class’ use of consumption spaces for socialising, and the ways this can construct social realms. These realms are not fixed within physical pieces of space, and are instead dependent on the density and proportions of the relationship types that are present (L. H. Lofland, 1998). Whilst recognising, as per Amin (2008), that physical and symbolic elements also shape our experiences of collective
identification in public spaces, this paper focuses specifically on these social elements. This is not only because it is social recognition that is at the heart of regular identification, but more significantly, because the layers of meaning that social realms produce are continually shifting with the ebb and flow of people within these spaces, potentially complicating the identification process. Understanding how these shifting social realms are experienced, and may aid or undermine identification, is thus an important aspect of understanding how regular collective identification may be experienced in the contemporary city, and the key aim of this paper.

To do so, this paper draws on autoethnographic research of my consumption experiences within an Australian inner city neighbourhood, conducted from September 2009 to September 2010. Through this autoethnography I sought to explore the ways consumption spaces can support experiences of place-based community, with a particular interest in the emotional and imaginative aspects of this process. The research data drawn on here comes from detailed research memos that recorded my interactions, identifications and emotional responses within these spaces. For this paper I focus specifically on my experiences of becoming a regular at Harry’s as a means of exploring regular identification in the contemporary inner city.

The Shapes of Third Places in Contemporary Inner City

Harry’s could be described as my third place. This term has been used to describe public locations outside of home and work that are host to regular, voluntary, informal and happily anticipated gatherings of individuals (Oldenburg, 1999). These regular’s bars and local’s cafes have been celebrated in research and popular culture for their perceived ability to facilitate “that easier version of friendship and congeniality that results from casual and informal affiliation” (Oldenburg, 1999, p. 65). They are said to achieve this by offering accessible, neutral spaces, where worries and inequalities are left at the door, and spirited, playful conversation is the focus of activity (Oldenburg, 1999). This is the idealised place ‘where everybody knows your name’.

Chapter Six: Anchoring and Exposing in the Third Place
Despite the undeniable appeal of the third place concept, these types of social and inclusive consumption spaces are more likely to be seen on television or in property development marketing than on the shopping streets of our neighbourhoods. Instead many consumption spaces are purely that; spaces in which individuals consume goods and services in ways that can encourage individualism, segregation, and stifle interaction. This has been attributed to a range of factors, including planning systems that encourage single use zoning, a reliance on cars limiting our use of public places, and the proliferation of shopping centres that focus on individualised consumption and manufactured experiences (L. H. Lofland, 1998; Oldenburg, 1999). In addition, the fundamentals of running a successful business can also work against a consumption space’s accessibility and neutrality. This is because location, décor, product offering, pricing, competition and advertising practices all physically and symbolically communicate a desired target audience and expected behaviour patterns that can implicitly shape customer interactions, and the meanings we attach to them (Bitner, 1992; Sherry, 1998b).

More subtly, the changing lifestyle preferences of residents of gentrifying neighbourhoods such as mine, may also work as a barrier to the development of third places. Research tell us the urban middle class demographic is one that engages in a broad range of lifestyle-based consumption activities for socialising purposes and as part of their identity construction (Lloyd, 2006; Zukin, 2010). However this is also a demographic that is said to be increasingly mobile, and thus less restricted by geographic boundaries, such as of the neighbourhood they live in (Amin, 2007). As I noted above, it was not often that I experienced a critical mass of regulars at Harry’s, indeed I rarely expected to. This is because whilst Harry’s target demographic would seem likely candidates for becoming regular cafe or bar customers, they are also likely to be socialising in a number of different cafes, bars, and restaurants across a number of different neighbourhoods in my city, thus reducing the frequency of their presence within any one particular location.

Finally, even those consumption spaces that do support social interaction may still not be operating as third places. This is because this sociality can alter a space’s level of openness, through the realms that it constructs. Lofland (1998) describes three types of social realms; public, parochial and private. Private realms are
dominated by intimate relations, parochial realms by communal relations, and the public realm by relations with people who are only categorically known. According to this classification, the regular’s cafe or bar is primarily operating as a parochial realm, identifiable by the shared sense of commonality that defines the regular collective. However naming the regular identification of the third place as the product of a social realm also highlights its fragility, and suggests that instead of being reliable and able to be anticipated, the collective identification such spaces offers is uncertain, and easily disrupted by the shifts in patronage and patterns of interaction that consumption based socialising can bring.

This fluidity is articulated in the work of Aubert-Gamet and Cova (1999), who describe two ways consumption spaces can support public collective identification; as anchoring and exposure sites. Anchoring sites are those within which an established collective gathers to interact and reinforce their shared identity. These are parochial realms in their more closed form, and are perhaps most likely to offer the certainty of the happily anticipated gathering that Oldenburg describes. However because of this they are also more likely to be exclusionary. This is because anchoring can limit collective identification to those who are recognised as community members, thus undermining the potential for openness.

This openness is instead found within exposure sites, in which individuals are able to observe and engage with the identification practices of others at limited risk. This is not quite the anomie of the public street, but neither is it the security of anchoring or the third place. This is because exposure realms can offer both familiarity, such as through the stability of physical setting, and strangeness, through the transience of customers and relationships. Furthermore, by hovering at the ever shifting boundary of parochial and public realms, these moments of exposure may offer the potential for the type of spontaneous conviviality that has been proposed as the basis for fleeting collective identifications (Amin, 2008; Maffesoli, 1996). That is, it may be that when a potential third place is dominated by an exposure realm, it is experienced as open and accessible, whereas when an anchoring realm dominates, the security of collective identification takes precedence.

It is the potential of social interaction at the boundaries of these realms and the ways it shapes regular identification that is of interest to this paper. This is because it is in
this shifting space that identifications themselves are most fluid, unpredictable, and thus open to opportunistic breaches in the patterns of interaction. This unpredictability, and the interaction strategies we adopt to negotiate it, may also suggest ways in which a certain kind of third place experience can be developed and maintained in the contemporary inner city, where consumption based socialising is high, but where people are also mobile and less tied into fixed patterns of patronage. The remainder of the paper draws on my experiences of regular identification in Harry’s to consider how this might work.

**Becoming a Harry’s Regular: Anchoring and the Regular Collective**

The Harry’s regular collective is formed from a loose social network of neighbourhood residents, variably connected through long established friendships and more recently established consumption space based acquaintances. Evenings such as the one described above work to reinforce that shared identity and the specialised knowledge that underpins it; of the quirks of the owners and staff, of our privileges and responsibilities as regulars, and of the shared cultural identity that reflects a specific aspect of the gentrifying neighbourhood in which we live.

However achieving this level of identification and belonging has not been not easy. Whilst Oldenburg (1999) suggests that to establish third place membership one mainly just turns up regularly and tries not to be obnoxious, my experience instead suggests it’s a slightly more complicated, and emotional process, which is not always positive. My research notes indicate that discontent, worry, and shame, were as much a feature of my interactions in Harry’s, as were moments of joy, excitement, or an optimistic feeling of connection. This paper suggests that these negative experiences often stemmed from the confusion created by the shifting realms of interaction that occurred within the bar.

This is because whilst Harry’s appeared to be a regular’s bar, it more often operated as an anchoring realm for a social network linked to the owners. Many of Harry’s regulars were established friends of the owners, and their shared identity definition appeared to be based on those primary ties. Whilst over time I became acquainted with some of this social network through my patronage, their dominance of the
One consequence of these shifting realms was that my perceived inability to penetrate this anchored social network led me to doubt the value and presence of a broader consumption space based regular collective. The boundaries between private, parochial, and public appeared rigid, with no potential for cumulative impacts from fleeting connections in the public realm. It also made me question my motives regarding this desire to identify as suggested here:

Thinking about tonight and Kevin [an owner] and Lucas [staff member] and introductions and realising I feel a bit let down/disappointed about the lack of something from them. But I realise also that is because I am wanting something more from them than the superficial I keep on going on about. I want recognition, as a person worth knowing. And that is perhaps where the thing of doing it by yourself falls down. I have an emotional investment in it. …

Linking back to my previous thoughts about being able to be placed within a social network – having that emotional certainty of being able to be identified as part of a specific social network would reinforce to ME, who I am within this place. That I had some kind of identifiable position — which is not about superficial connections at all — it’s about recognisable strong ties. (Research note, 2nd February 2009)

As this excerpt suggests, I struggled to appreciate the identification within my interactions in Harry’s, because I had difficulty separating my emotional need for recognition from the implication that a lack of acknowledgement beyond the superficial I theoretically expected was a social rejection. That is, I had difficulty negotiating the boundary between the parochial realm of the regular collective, and its manifestation as a more closed private realm for the anchored social network. I expected regular, voluntary, informal and happily anticipated gatherings (Oldenburg,
1999), instead what I got was the brief hellos and limited yet enjoyable conversations that mark the sociality of public collective identifications.

It could be suggested that what I also failed to grasp here is the difference between regularity as collective and as an individual identification. It is the collective identity that is reinforced in the parochial realm, as is evident in the description that opened this paper, and yet what I hoped for was recognition as an individual, “a person worth knowing”. However as the following section will suggest, the regular identity can also be experienced, and actively embraced, as an individual identity within realms of exposure. And it is through this version of the regular identity, that this paper suggests that some kind of personal recognition is able to be achieved.

**Becoming a Harry’s Regular: Exposing the Regular as Individual**

Given the level of comfort and connection expressed within the research excerpt that opened this paper, it is clear that I overcame the uncertainty described in the previous section, and was able to establish myself within the Harry’s regular collective. This is despite, as noted above, that both the presence and openness of Harry’s regular collective was unpredictable. However this uncertainty also created a tension that could be said to positively increase the openness of the space. This is because it challenged the predictability that can be associated with anchored regularity, and instead forced me to look outside that identity for those reliable moments of easy friendship and congeniality within realms of exposure. That is, because of the uncertainty regarding both the presence and openness of established regulars, I often turned to fleeting interactions with non-regulars to generate that sense of identification.

The influence of non-regulars can be downplayed in ethnographies of cafes and bars, perhaps because they tend to be excluded from the primary groups identifications that are being investigated. Katovich and Reese (1987) provide the most detailed description of their relevance to the regular identity when they describe how the non-regulars in the Big Derby Lounge were used as tools against which established regulars compared their position and standing, as well as being a potential pool of recruits. This paper argues that non-regulars are also significant because their
presence alters the realms operating within the space, thus creating opportunities for interactions at those boundaries that can be identity defining.

My interactions with non-regulars in Harry’s generally offered the opportunity for spirited, playful and at times quite involved conversations, in which acquired knowledge, familiarity with staff or products, or simple statements of attachment were sufficient markers to establish an experience of regular identification in the eyes of the other. Whilst at times the density of these strangers altered Harry’s realms to the extent I did not feel at home at all, they nonetheless provided an avenue through which to remedy the uncertainties created by my interactions with the anchored social network.

These non-regular interactions were able to do this because they operated at the low emotional involvement but high emotional gain boundary between fleeting public realm relations, and more meaningful experiences of exposure, where shared values and identities are on display. That is, I was confirming my regular identity not through an experience of the regular collective, but through an experience of being an individual and a regular. And in each successful encounter there was also the affirmation I had unsuccessfully sought through the regular collective, the emotional certainty that I had some kind of identifiable position within that place.

**Conclusion: Anchoring and Exposing in the Third Place**

This paper has drawn from my experiences in Harry’s to explore the process of regular identification as it operates at the boundaries of social realms. This focus provides a means to explore the ways that regular collective identification may develop in the contemporary inner city, where regularity can be sporadic and consumption based socialising is common. Drawing on autoethnographic work, this paper suggests that regularity is experienced both as an individual, and a collective identity, according to the nature of the realms operating within the space. Collective identification occurs in anchoring realms, and supports the established regular group, whereas individual regular identification occurs within exposure realms, and relies on recognition from willing non-regulars. Furthermore, this paper suggests it is the latter of these identifications that is the more easily achieved, because it can be
experienced at the exposure boundaries of the parochial realm, a less risky and more accessible place to identify when patronage is infrequent and social realms so fluid.

It is this use of non-regular relations to balance the emotional work involved in the development of anchored relationships that I believe points to the true potential of third places in the contemporary inner city. Establishing a place where everybody knows your name is improbable in this context. However encouraging consumption spaces in which an individual’s regular patronage can form the basis of an identification, from which one can both anchor and expose, may ultimately work to support a kind of contemporary inner city version of the easier friendship and congeniality that the third place is hoped to offer.

**Chapter Six Conclusion: ‘Sometimes you want to go where somebody recognises your anchored identity’**

A key aim of this journal article was to explore the potential of the third place as a space of identification and belonging within the contemporary inner city. Drawing on my experiences of becoming a regular at Harry’s, the paper described the ways that the fluidity of our encounters in public and quasi-public spaces shapes the identification experiences they offer, even within thoroughly domesticated spaces such as one’s favourite bar. In doing so this paper delves further into the processes of individual identification within anchoring realms raised in the previous chapter, highlighting the ways that different kinds of social relations and emotional responses are drawn upon in the construction of that experience of being a regular.

However, as noted above, M/C Journal publishes short journal articles that aim to be accessible to a readership outside of academia, and in that respect I faced constraints as to the extent to which I could explore issues related to anchoring realms and their role in supporting imagined neighbourhood-based community. Some of these elements were addressed in chapter five, where I argued that feeling that a neighbourhood offers a location in which an individual (and cultural group) can anchor plays an important role in supporting place-based identification, as the consumption space becomes an extension of the self. In that chapter I also highlighted the manner in which this anchoring experience may operate as a
simultaneous action or object that is able to project the imagined presence of community. In this final section I expand on the relationship between this emplaced experience of belonging and the imagining of community. In particular I consider the processes of fantasy, reflexivity, and projection as they relate to that imagining of community through consumption practices and experiences in public and quasi-public spaces.

As outlined within the review of literature, when we imagine community we generate a presence that feels real, but is also a fiction. This process can be tinged with emotion and fantasy, yet still incorporate a reflexive awareness of the imagined nature of its construction. I suggest that this interplay is evident in the emotional uncertainties, and experiences of confusion and disappointment described above, and exemplifies the insecurity that Bauman (2001) argues is bound up in the process of seeking to experience community within a fluid social environment. Indeed, as this paper argued, the fluid patterns of social interactions and shifting densities of people within Harry’s had a significant impact on the ways I experienced identification within this space, such that my orientation would also shift – from seeking anchoring for myself, to offering exposure to others, to feeling as if I did not identify with the space at all. Furthermore I suggest that the negative emotional experiences described above stemmed from a fascinated consciousness that failed to recognise these shifting collective benchmarks, nor retain a reflexive openness to the possibilities within the broader affective atmosphere that played an important role in constructing an imagined presence within that space.

However I argue that this emotional interplay also highlights the important role of the other in the construction of the imagined community. As outlined within the literature review, this other acts as a collective against which the individual is defined, yet is also a product of the imaginings of those individual members. In the same way it could be argued that, through my experiences at Harry’s, I construct both the imaginary of the social network collective, from which I feel excluded, as well as the regular collective with which I identify as I seek my experiences of belonging through quasi-primary relations. In these latter encounters I project the presence of the regular collective as I construct an exposure realm through my interactions with non-regulars. That is, through my individual actions and
imaginings I construct the norms of a collective against which others can make assessments of their own community membership.

Furthermore, following Massey (2005), the imagined presence not only shapes my fleeting interactions and experiences of the collective in the present, but are also projected into my future and used to re-evaluate my past: as a desire for recognition as “a person worth knowing”, or an appreciation of “the effort and pain of the work I put into gaining that identity”. That is, I am also able to step out (or perhaps further into) the collective I have constructed to reflexively evaluate my identification with it. Thus one could suggest that the tension between individualism and community, which Bauman argues underpins our quest for community, is not a singular dichotomy, but instead one of multiple tensions between the trajectories of multiple individual and collective identifications. In that respect the theme song of a contemporary version of the famous bar-based situation comedy Cheers would perhaps more correctly go something like, ‘Sometimes you want to go where somebody recognises your anchored identity.’ And also your face, and hopefully your name too – eventually.

My experiences in Harry’s demonstrate the extent to which our experiences of belonging hinge on an oscillation between an emotionally present fiction and a reflexive recognition of its fleeting and constructed nature. This chapter has also described how, within that process, we ourselves willingly become a projection of the presence of the community our behaviours are constructing. The manner through which other people can become objects that project the presence of imagined community is explored in more detail in chapter eight. The following chapter more closely considers the role of the exposure realm, and in particular the ways that its physical and symbolic elements contribute to this reflexive construction.
Chapter Seven

“Just Going Down The Street”: Constructing community through everyday movements

This chapter has been accepted for inclusion in an edited volume on Mobility Method, Ethnography and the City, compiled by Tim Shortell and Evrick Brown from City University, New York. While details are still being finalised, it is expected that this volume will be published by Temple University Press, and in late 2013.

In this chapter I draw on my everyday movements through the public and quasi-public spaces of Northcote to explore questions raised within Massey’s theorisation of space as a throwntogetherness, and Amin’s application of this to the potential for collective culture in the contemporary city. To do so, I approach these spaces as potential realms of exposure, which – as discussed in the literature review – can support collective identification by enabling low-level exposure to the identification practices of others in environments perceived to be safe. This chapter extends that research by also considering the ways that different exposure realms connect through patterns of movement and how this may translate into a broader experience or understanding of neighbourhood-based community. As with earlier chapters, a conclusion that follows the submitted text draws out relations between the chapter content and the research questions of the thesis.

Introduction

This chapter explores the manner in which ordinary public spaces shape the ways we experience neighbourhood-based community. In particular, the chapter’s focus is to consider the ways the physical, social, and symbolic elements of a neighbourhood’s main street and shopping centre come together through movement and, over time, into a realm of exposure that supports place-based collective identification. This chapter considers the ways in which Massey’s concept of the throwntogetherness of space and Amin’s related theories of situated multiplicity (and how it may support
collective culture) can be applied to our understandings of neighbourhood community.

To do so, I draw on my everyday experiences of moving in and through the main street and shopping centre of my inner city neighbourhood. These spaces both feature individualised consumption spaces that are physically and symbolically connected into a larger coherent public space by footpaths, roadways, and the movement of people through them. Separately these spaces seem to appeal to, and communicate, different elements of the neighbourhood’s diverse population and fragmented identity. However, the trajectories of my patterns of movement allow us to see the possible ways that the throwntogetherness of these spaces creates opportunities for the construction and juxtaposition of shared identities, attachments, and experiences that can be cumulatively representative of a collective culture of a neighbourhood.

**Situated Multiplicity and Exposure Realms in Public Space**

The contemporary city is increasingly recognised as a space where human relations are entangled with elements of global and local material and visual culture, including flows of money, information and people. According to this perspective, our experiences of the city cannot be reduced to inter-human relations, and are instead produced by the coming together of trajectories: of people, objects, history, symbolism, behaviours, and time (Amin, 2007; Amin & Thrift, 2002; Massey, 2005; Urry, 2000). This confluence of people, things, and discourse is well captured in Massey’s concept of space as a throwntogetherness (2005), a term that describes the ways these trajectories come together in a moment of negotiation, and are then dispersed, at different times, speeds, and directions. For Massey this throwntogetherness means that places are not fixed; instead, they are best understood as a collection of stories-so-far whose meaning is generated through our negotiations of those trajectories (2005). That is, it is the manner in which we make sense of the ways that these varying spatialities and temporalities come together that emplaces meaning. This research supports this perspective, and in particular its argument of the important role that objects and discourses play in shaping our imaginings of the
communities we may experience within such an environment. In this chapter, I explore what this means for the way we understand neighbourhood-based community.

Of course, the more complex our interpretations of urban spaces’ potential to support emplaced meanings, the more partial our attempts to understand them become. This raises questions: how we can seek to practically comprehend the collective potential of the momentary coming together of people, traffic, advertising signage, crumbling planter boxes, restored buildings, and breakfast in a cafe, on an individual’s willingness to engage? Or on their interpretation of that engagement as something more than adherence to the basic norms of public space interaction? Exploring this complexity through the everyday movements of one individual is the aim of this chapter.

Amin’s recent work considers the implications of these perspectives of space and place for the collective potential of public space in urban contexts (Amin, 2007, 2008, 2010; Amin & Thrift, 2002). Drawing on Massey’s concept of throwntogetherness, Amin argues that when visibly manifest as an unconstrained circulation of multiple bodies in a shared physical space, our negotiations of this situated multiplicity may generate a social ethos with potentially strong civic connotations (Amin, 2008). Our responses to this multiplicity can include reflexes that seek to limit our exposure to this intensity, as has been previously noted in relation to public space (e.g., L. H. Lofland, 1998). Yet at the same time, Amin argues that the juxtaposition of diversity and difference at the heart of the multiplicity can also create opportunities for impositions and breaches that can support a tacit collective experience (2007, 2008).

To examine the ways that this multiplicity is experienced, and could be supported, Amin describes a series of elements – termed resonances, which condition social action in ways that he calls social reflexes (2008). These resonances include the situated surplus, territorialisation, emplacement, emergence, and symbolic projection; according to Amin, these can generate reflexes that include tolerance of the multiplicity, spatial ordering, and symbolic compliance. For example, through resonances such as territorialisation and emplacement, our daily patterns of usage work to pattern and domesticate public space, both spatially and temporally. The

Chapter Seven: Constructing Community Through Everyday Movements

137
spatial ordering this reflexively generates reduces (or tames) some of the threats associated with the surplus, such as the anxiety and confusion long associated with the urban crowd. Conversely, this ordering also allows for an appreciation of the disruptions or surprises that continually emerge from the multiplicity. These emergences can work to create novelty, even in familiar spaces, by introducing the possibility of new rhythms and unexpected encounters that stimulate our senses and contribute to the vibrancy of the multiplicity. Finally, the symbolic projections of physical and aesthetic elements, such as architecture, advertising, and the cultural displays of users, can subtly shape patterns of behaviour, and attributions of identity.

Here we can begin to see links from Amin’s work back to more traditional studies of the city and public space. Tolerance of multiplicity, for example, reflects the work of Goffman (1963) and Lofland (1998), amongst others, on the norms of interaction that shape our reactions to the surplus of public spaces – with tools such as civil inattention surely an important element in this toleration. Similarly, the potential of emergences to support collective engagement and cosmopolitanism is foregrounded in optimistic accounts of the manner in which this toleration can be positively disrupted through both everyday sociality and more performative expressions of identity, such as festivals and flash mobs (e.g., Jacobs, 1961; Oldenburg, 1999; Stevens, 2007; Watson, 2006). The implications of tolerance of multiplicity and the domesticating potential of ordering is demonstrated in research on the light touch sociality that can develop within routinised patterning of spaces; it can work to habituate difference in ways that build tolerance between cultural and ethnic groups (Watson, 2006, 2009; Wise, 2011).

It is important to note that Amin does not deny that public and quasi-public spaces can be experienced as privatised, regulated, isolating, antagonistic, and discriminatory. This is significant because, as many urban researchers have argued, the ordering of public space through urban design, surveillance, and regulation can exclude certain kinds of uses and people, and work to privatise public space (e.g., R. Atkinson, 2003a; Crawford, 1992; Zukin, 1995). A key argument within such work is that this kind of ordering can reduce the civic potential Amin claims for situated multiplicity, and may instead rely on tolerations that mask uneven power relations and only serve to perpetuate inequalities (Valentine, 2008). However, it is also
possible to understand these perspectives through Amin’s framework, with a focus on the manner in which these resonances and reflexes are used as tools of power and resistance, rather than of civil and social possibility (see Neal, 2009 for a discussion of these different perspectives on public space).

It is for this reason, however, that Amin limits his claims for the potential of situated multiplicity to the types of spaces that are open, crowded, diverse, incomplete, improvised, and disorderly, or lightly regulated (2008). Marketing research has described these types of spaces as sites of exposure; this chapter proposes this can operate as a useful concept through which to frame the potential of situated multiplicity. The exposure concept was proposed by Aubert-Gamet and Cova in their exploration of the manner in which consumption spaces may support experiences of community (1999). Drawing on established notions of spaces as closed and open, Aubert-Gamet and Cova proposed postmodern versions they term anchoring and exposure places. Anchoring sites are those in which established communities reinforce their connections – the type of sites Lofland (1998) describes as parochial realms, and Oldenburg (1999) celebrates as third places. Exposure sites are those where a social link can be formed through exposure to the identification practices of others in ways that involve limited risk. These are spaces in which one is not exactly at home, nor feels as if in the home of an other; yet they are also not non-places (Aubert-Gamet and Cova, 1999). Instead, they are a safe space where one is able to experience a connection with others through shared low-level identifications.

In their recommendations for supporting community within anchoring and exposure spaces, Aubert-Gamet and Cova suggest strategies such as introducing spontaneity and the potential for disruptions; in doing so they foreshadow the arguments of Amin above. At the same time, however, Aubert-Gamet and Cova also imply that the postmodern model of the exposure place had not yet been invented. In this chapter, I suggest instead that the exposure concept can be usefully applied to describe the potential Amin proposes for situated multiplicity within public space. Furthermore I argue that an important component of understanding how this exposure role may be applied is to recognise the thrown-together manner in which the link of exposure comes about, and emphasise the fluidity of the elements that construct it. An exposure realm thus becomes a moment in space and time where
physical, social, and symbolic elements come together in ways that are experienced as a moment of collective encounter with diverse others.

The aim of this chapter, then, is to explore the manner in which Amin’s concept of situated multiplicity can illuminate the ways that exposure realms are constructed within public space. I take this approach because this chapter does not only aim to consider the manner in which a shopping centre or market may support exposure, as per Watson and Wise above, but also explores the ways this exposure comes to be related to place-based community. That is, not only exposure that habituates difference in a way that may be interpreted as civic culture generally, but exposure that constructs links between different individuals or groups of people that specifically relate to a third identity: that of the neighbourhood in which those exposure realms are situated.

To do so, the chapter focuses on my everyday experiences of being in and moving through two ordinary spaces in my neighbourhood: its shopping centre and its main shopping street. Both are types of open and lightly regulated spaces that Amin describes, and that I argue offer potential as realms of exposure. However, because of the differences in the ways the physical, social, and symbolic are throwntogether in these spaces, the exposure they offer takes on distinct forms. The manner in which these spaces themselves come together into a broader realm of exposure is then also a focus of the chapter. I explore this throwntogetherness through the trajectory of my regular walking route – from my house, through the shopping centre, and down the main street – and consider how these movements construct realms of exposure that are experienced as place-based community. The following sections provide a brief background of the neighbourhood, its public spaces and the methodology of this research, before inviting you to take a walk with me; to share in my interactions with people, objects, and symbols as they work together to construct my experiences of my neighbourhood, and my sense of my place within it.

A Partial History of Northcote’s Public Spaces

Northcote is an established residential suburb of approximately 23,000 people in inner city Melbourne that is undergoing a slow process of gentrification. As with
many gentrifying areas, Northcote’s shifting identity is writ large within its built form and public spaces. It can be seen in the revitalisation of historical buildings as cultural centres, in the renovation of old houses and the new apartment developments on old industrial sites, the increasing diversity of cafes, bars, and restaurants, and in the ever shifting demographic mix of people who frequent these spaces. These shifts are particularly evident within Northcote’s two key public spaces: High Street and Northcote Plaza. It is these two spaces that have been the focus of my research, and my experiences of this neighbourhood. The remainder of this section provides a brief description of these spaces.

The High Street shopping area is the lifestyle and entertainment precinct of Northcote. It is also one of the main arterial roads and public transport routes through Melbourne’s northeast. In this chapter I focus on a section known as Ruckers Hill, which runs from the James Street/Town Hall area to just beyond Separation Street and Northcote Plaza – a distance of approximately 700 metres (see figure two).
At the time of writing, this section of around 200 different businesses included four live music venues; five additional bars; and at least 30 restaurants and cafes including those serving food from Japan, India, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, Thailand, Nepal, Mexico, Italy, and Greece. There are also designer and vintage clothing and gift stores, bookstores, children’s clothing and toy stores, alternative and mainstream health services, beauticians, and hairdressers. The area also includes a pawn shop and short-term money lender, a national brand pizza takeaway, takeaway food shops selling kebabs and fish and chips, chemists, dry cleaners, an alterations shop, a small supermarket, a number of professional services such as accountants and lawyers, health services targeted at the Indigenous population and employment services for those with disabilities, as well as a number of long-term vacant and somewhat derelict shop fronts. High Street operates as a day and night economy, with the last bar closing as late as five a.m., and the cafes opening from seven.

![Image]

Figure Three: High Street according to the Northcote Business Association

This diversity of architecture, business types, and hours of operation means that the High Street precinct does not project a coherent identity through its appearance and consumption offering. Instead this diversity creates both spatial and temporal clusters: around specific landmark businesses or precincts, and times of the day and week. Thus, whilst some sections appear quite gentrified, others target particular ethnic groups, or a geographical demographic. That is, whilst High Street offers the clearest expression of the neighbourhood’s gentrification, it also reflects the area’s broader diversity by offering a range of identification opportunities.
High Street’s business offering is also shaped by its proximity to Northcote Plaza, which is just off the intersection of High Street and Separation Street. This 18,000 square metre enclosed shopping centre was built on an old brickworks site in the early 1980s. The adjacent clay pit first served as a rubbish dump, and is now a large park. Northcote Plaza contains over 60 different shops, including two supermarkets; a discount department store; services such as banking, the post office and Medicare (the National Health Insurance scheme); and a range of other food and retail stores including bakeries, chemists, a newsagent, a butcher, a health food store, a key cutter, a travel agent, a pet shop, takeaway food outlets, telecommunications retailers, plus some low-cost clothing and homewares stores, and generic ‘$2’ shops. The centre itself is open from six a.m. until midnight, with restricted access from 10 p.m. This allows customers to access the late-night supermarket, but limits which doors they can use. It is only at these later hours that a security presence is evident, patrolling the empty spaces of the shopping centre, presumably to safeguard the security of the closed shops and prevent untoward activity from late-night users.

Figure Four: Northcote Plaza according to the marketing agents

The Plaza’s everyday offering is reflected in its usage; it is consistently well patronised by a broad range of people: families, couples, people by themselves, the elderly, school children, and those from a range of ethnic backgrounds. On Saturdays, when it is cold, or raining (which is common in Melbourne), the centre is bustling – often in stark contrast to the quiet High Street just beyond it. Indeed, Plaza customer traffic counts suggest that over 110,000 people go through its doors every week (Northcote Plaza, no date). Even when multiple visits are taken into account, this customer count highlights the extent to which Northcote Plaza services residents from surrounding areas, and reinforces Northcote’s designation within planning.
policy as an activity centre for residents of the broader area (Department of Infrastructure, 2002). However, Northcote Plaza is not a destination mall, and is instead better described as a neighbourhood shopping centre that primarily offers mundane provisioning.

In many ways, then, the everyday offering of the Plaza is complementary to the more lifestyle-focused offering of High Street. Indeed, these two spaces could be said to be evolving together; the Plaza’s offering concentrates provisioning activities within its walls, leaving High Street businesses to specialise according to changing demographics. It is the interplay between these two spaces, the different types of exposure realms that they offer, and the ways this shapes experiences of Northcote’s collective identity, that is of interest to this chapter.

To explore this interplay I draw on autoethnographic data recorded over three years of my experiences of being in Northcote’s public spaces. The purpose of that investigation was to explore the relation between consumption spaces and practices, and experiences of community within a gentrifying neighbourhood environment. Following the methods of autoethnography as described by Ellis (2004), I recorded research memos that focused on my actions, interactions, and emotional responses, as I moved within and through the public and quasi-public spaces of this neighbourhood. The wealth of observational and experiential data gathered over this time has enabled me to not only explore the ways the physical, social, and symbolic elements of these spaces may support or constrain public sociality and identification with a neighbourhood-based community, but also to consider how the interplay between different spaces contributes to that process.

In this chapter I draw on these experiences to construct what Ellis calls a composite or telescoped narrative (2004). These are used in autoethnography to provide insight into personal experiences whilst managing for erroneous details or repetition. In this case I am throwing together my experiences from thousands of walks down the street – a trip of 20 minutes or so – into a story of one journey. The aim of the narrative, then, is to focus on the manner in which the physical, social, and symbolic elements of these spaces are brought together through my ordinary patterns of movement. That is, how – when moving in and through these spaces – I am constructing realms of exposure, which themselves are then throwntogether over
multiple journeys into an evolving experience of neighbourhood-based community. My story of my journey through these spaces begins, as it always does, with Northcote Plaza.

**Ordinary Consumers Rubbing Along in the Plaza**

The Plaza is just down the road from my house, and is a space I visit many times a week for everyday goods and services, or to pass through on my way to High Street. This relatively ordinary consumption space has become a fundamental component of the way I understand the identity of my neighbourhood. It is also a site to which I now feel a great deal of attachment, as I have territorialised and emplaced the Plaza’s spaces and the routines it supports into my patterns of moving through my neighbourhood.

Within the first few weeks of moving to the area in May 2008, I established a habitual walking route to the Plaza (see figure two): down the residential streets of Darebin Road and St David Street, and then through one section of the adjacent All Nations Park. From there I follow a footpath that leads past a basketball court and skate ramp down to two of the shopping centre entrances. Even when I am heading to High Street beyond, I still follow this route through the park and the Plaza. It is more visually pleasing and safer than cutting through the car park that surrounds the centre, and faster than following the main roads down to High Street. Mostly, however, this route is just habit: an ordering reflex that was established at a time when I was shedding the patterns of a different neighbourhood and city, and making them anew in Northcote. As noted above, spatial ordering can serve as a means of taming the uncertainty of the urban environment. In my case this patterning also helped to recreate structure and familiarity in an environment that was unfamiliar to me, and in which I had no established social networks to guide patterns of behaviour or consumption space preferences.
However, habits also require minimal cognitive monitoring, and thus as I follow my route down the residential streets and through the park, my mind wanders to other things: where I am going today, whom I might see, or what I need to buy. Or I wonder again over the shopping centre’s poorly designed car park. Whilst providing parking for up to 900 cars, it makes no allowances for the associated pedestrian use, creating an awkward and unsafe environment to move through. Yet it also contains a number of trees that birds come to roost in every night, and which sometimes draw me over to experience the cacophony of their chattering. As I pass the skate park, I think on this potentially problematic but busy public space, which seems safe and accessible to a broad range of children and young people, and yet was also the site of the accidental shooting of a teenager by police. Over many months I watched the construction of the apartment block above the Plaza, contemplating who might live there and why the relevant government departments approved its visually oppressive design and height that appears to contravene local planning law. Its residents now watch me looking at them as I pass by.
The apartment development and associated shops were completed in November 2010 – yet a year later the shops still remained empty. This is despite that some open to a paved outdoor piazza area, complete with public art installation and a view of the park, which is suggested by the letting agent marketing posters as a suitable environment for cafe or restaurant. Such an offering would seem out of context in the Plaza as is, yet at the same time reflective of the aesthetic of the new development. I had many conversations with area residents during the construction period regarding the potential impact of this development on the culture of the Plaza. The most common concern was that the development would mark the beginning of this space’s gentrification; the middle class residents it targeted would demand access to lifestyle products and services of a higher quality than those currently offered by the food court cafes and takeaways that make up the Plaza’s existing food and beverage offering. To date this has not come to pass, with the Italian bakery/cafe that opened there in January 2012 seeming to attract a customer demographic that could be described as broadly mainstream. However, it is still early days in the life of this apartment building.

Entering the Plaza usually brings a halt to my wonderings, and draws my attention back to the task at hand – or at least to the environment in which I am undertaking it. As is often noted of shopping centres, their design is intended to deemphasise time and climate and to mask their commercial intent within a sanitised version of public space – in ways that reduce user identities to that of consumer, and situates consumption in a spectacle that emphasises hypereality and superficial meanings (e.g., Auge, 1995; Crawford, 1992; Gottdiener, 1998; Langman, 1992). Despite its ordinariness, in many ways the symbolic projections of the Plaza are no different.

The wide passageway I follow has a ceiling of clear glass, thus offering a regulated experience of the weather outside. Piped music subtly captures my attention and has me silently singing along to songs from the 80s and 90s that I still remember the words to, as I stroll past the benches, rubbish bins, pot plants, and permanent and temporary business stalls that punctuate the Plaza’s public spaces. School holidays feature performances from Elvis, a magician, and Santa in an intersection of the passageways that creates space for a stage. However, I am less confident the plans of a local musician to run a series of performances of local independent music will
come to fruition, highlighting that emergences themselves can still be constrained by the overriding order of the space.

![Figure Seven: Enjoying the sunshine in the Plaza](image)

Yet whilst these passageways may be privatised and somewhat constrained, compared to the mostly empty footpaths and park space I have just passed through, they are also full of people: walking, waiting, loitering, and people watching. Rides and games encourage children to stop and play, forcing their parents to linger whilst their children try to work the machines. Nearby bank automatic teller machines allow users to watch the people watchers, and the children, while they wait in line. Sometimes I see people I know or recognise, and we pass with a waved hello, or stop for a brief chat before moving on with our shopping. Indeed this ballet of the Plaza seems to mimic what is idealised as public space sociality (e.g., Jacobs, 1961), where established principles of public space interaction support diverse demographic mingling and toleration of the mostly banal multiplicity of this shopping centre. And despite recognising the superficiality of this ballet, it does not stop me from experiencing it as a meaningful display of public sociality, nor appreciating this as the most consistently active public space within the neighbourhood.
As I continue down the passageway in the filtered sunshine, I glance into the Chinese Massage shop, where customers on fold-up plastic seats receive clothed massages in full view of passers-by. At times I stop for a 20-minute neck and shoulder massage, one of the many pleasures of the Plaza that my friends and I make affectionate jokes about. Other times I try to smile at staff that I think that I recognise. But I am not confident I am familiar to them, and feel fleetingly embarrassed because I know that I do not always sufficiently look at their faces to be able to distinguish between many of them. The smile comes out thinly. Urban theorists concerned with power relations in public spaces may argue that my engagement with this service could be read as a middle class privilege that reduces cross-cultural engagement to a fleeting transaction (e.g., Butler & Robson, 2003; Valentine, 2008; Zukin, 2010). Yet by situating their massage practice in a shopping centre, rather than for example a health clinic, specialist massage studio, or acupuncture practice, the providers of this service must also be seen to be complicit in this process of standardisation.

Furthermore, the reduction of such a personal service to a shopping centre transaction makes familiarisation feel odd, and my attempts at pleasantry or to establish a practitioner/patient relationship feel awkward within that context. Yet at the same time, the low cost and convenience increases the frequency of my patronage, and thus my also my exposure to the cultural symbols and practices that remain: the map of the body’s acupuncture meridians, and the plastic lucky cat with the waving hand. Today I do not stop; however, I am pleased when one or two of the employees notice my glance and smile, and smile in response as I go by.

My passage through the Plaza also takes me past the group of elderly Greek men who regularly occupy some tables at a cafe that is positioned at a key passageway.
intersection, and one of the prime people watching spots within the Plaza. It was my growing awareness of this group of men that highlighted the importance of the Plaza to the public culture of my neighbourhood, as well as my developing attachment to this space. For these men, the Plaza appears to operate as an anchoring realm where they come together to socialise and survey the comings and goings of other Plaza patrons. This type of anchoring behaviour enables established communities to reinforce the social network connections within public spaces, and has been recorded in shopping centres elsewhere, particularly in relation to teenagers and the elderly (Sandikci & Holt, 1998). However, what is less often considered is the manner in which this anchoring behaviour shapes its broader context, and those who, such as myself, are exposed to but excluded from this process of collective identification.

For me, their seemingly constant presence operates as a slower moving trajectory that symbolically anchors this piece of space as something more than a site of instrumental consumption. Their appropriation of this space – for purposes other than those projected by the décor, music, and advertising signage – is a juxtaposition that only serves to highlight the lack of hyperreality or spectacle in this overwhelmingly ordinary space. Furthermore, in their watching of me as I pass them by, I become a trajectory that moves through their world: another actor in the Plaza tableaux that is constructed through our looking. And thus in their gathering there, and in my passing by, we become objects in each other’s patterning of space, which (for me at least) embeds a human element that further undermines the Plaza’s symbolic inducements to consume.

Figure Nine: The Plaza as an anchoring realm
Over time I have become quite attached to the Plaza’s sociality and ordinariness. Through that attachment it has become more than a convenient location in which to access everyday goods and services, but also one that offers me a sense of connection to other residents of my neighbourhood through our shared construction of this exposure realm. I would not claim, however, that this exposure provides me with any particular insight into the world of these Greek men whom I look forward to seeing when I pass; nor of the Chinese who give massages and whom I care about being recognised by; nor the parents and their children, the elderly women often sitting on benches, or any of the other types of people I see in the Plaza. Instead, as Wise (2011) similarly describes in a Sydney shopping centre food court, this is mostly a banal sharing of space where all of our otherness is habituated because it is framed within the parameters of everyday consumption. Rather than lament this constrained sociality as evidence of an impoverished civic culture, I would suggest that this ordinary sharing of space is effective as an exposure realm precisely because there is no real interaction to shatter the imagined connection that is created.

This is not to suggest, of course, that all Northcote residents bear this kind of affection toward the Plaza. I have spoken to many who disparage it for many of the same reasons that I am enamoured with it. Significantly, however, this does not prevent them from using this space; this, I argue, is the key factor that underlies the Plaza’s success as a space that facilitates exposure. That is, its instrumentality, which overrides many consumption preferences or cultural group identifications, allows the Plaza to play a unique role; it supports a diverse population in a gentrifying area by reducing the differentiation, which gentrification thrives on, into shared everyday shopping practices. This creates an atmosphere of ordinariness that does not seek to bridge ethnic or social divides, but instead exposes one to the demographic diversity of the neighbourhood within a physical and symbolic environment that is designed to negate such difference. However, to appreciate the significance of this ordinary shopping centre supporting these everyday expressions of commonality and sociality, the Plaza needs to be considered in the context of the other public space that is directly adjacent to it, Northcote’s High Street. In the following section I continue my walk down High Street, to explore those differences, and their cumulative effects for my experience of place-based community in Northcote.
Movement and Differentiation in High Street

Usually, after passing the group of Greek men, I would head into the supermarket for mundane necessities, and sometimes to the Italian delicatessen, or the chemist, or the health food store. Today, however, I am going on to High Street, and thus continue through the Plaza passageways and out the south-western doors. I speed up as I approach the pedestrian crossing, thinking again on the poor design of the car access and parking of the shopping centre. The steady stream of pedestrians at this crossing can create a bottleneck for drivers, and in deference to the times I’ve sat in my car waiting, I attempt to keep up with the pedestrians in front of me.

Because it is sunny, I follow the footpath around the outside of Northcote Central. This smaller and less vibrant shopping centre contains additional everyday shopping amenities that I very rarely use. For me it mostly serves as a continuation of the indoor passageway through to High Street that I follow in poor weather, or when habit takes over. The exterior footpath I follow today takes me past grey concrete walls, loading bays, rubbish bins, car park entrances, painted-over windows, locked doorways that lead to empty shops or shops that have chosen to restrict access from the street. This empty street space is one of the reasons why, when I walk home at night, I mostly follow the longer route along the main roads – not because I feel it is unsafe, but because its sense of abandonment creates an uneasy juxtaposition with the activity of the High Street spaces I have just left. The local government, Darebin City Council, have changed the zoning of this area to encourage uses that they hope will improve the pedestrian link between the Plaza and the High Street (Ecologically Sustainable Design & Alphaplan, 2007). It is yet to have any significant effect.
I pass quickly through this space and approach the busy Separation Street intersection. This intersection marks the boundary between the Plaza, and High Street, and there is little sign of Northcote’s gentrification in its built form or business types. Instead the physical environment is dominated by warehouse-style buildings and discount retailers, including a discount chemist, a warehouse style sporting goods store, an intermittently empty art deco building, and the now empty and tired looking shop space of a recently closed discount supermarket. This space is also defined by the constant flow of cars, trams, and people moving through the intersection. Occasionally I see and fleetingly smile at people I recognise, or banter with someone who has followed the same path from the Plaza and also waits to cross the road, but mostly I just wait for the traffic lights to change.
In contrast to the comforting predictability of the Plaza, High Street is a less coherent public space – one where the area’s cultural past and future unfolds in fragments through its built form, consumption offerings, and range of uses. Heading from north to south, one passes through a series of areas that subtly represent different aspects of the suburb’s culture and history and which offer significant contrast to the seemingly unchanging present of the Plaza. In doing so, High Street communicates the ways that time and movement overlap in the production of this neighbourhood in ways that the Plaza cannot. However, its representations of this identity are more likely to be expressed in built or symbolic form, as High Street’s public spaces are often devoid of people.

The lights change and I cross the road heading south. The business offering of this section contains little that appeals to me and thus I rarely focus on the activities occurring within them. Instead, as I walk through this section of the street it is the juxtaposition of the physical manifestations of the area’s identities and different temporalities of people and things that most attracts my attention. The slow escape of the tree from its planter box, changing the mosaic handiwork of an earlier attempt at place-making into a health and safety risk, is made more apparent by the regular passing of trams, and the seemingly unending changes in business ownership and offering. Three large two-storey Victorian buildings, sensitively converted into offices and apartments, dominate this area. Their age, beauty, and seemingly unchanging presence contrast with the mix of late 20th century shopfronts that house businesses ranging from kebab stores, a dry cleaner and a pawn shop, to lawyers, accountants and real estate agents, or those that seem to endlessly turn over. An organic bakery became a takeaway pizza shop, and then a Vietnamese restaurant. A fashion boutique became a formal dressmaker, and is now a bar. Its décor and design do not appeal to me and communicate a target market I do not identify with, and so it’s unlikely I will ever go in. A recent Darebin City Council notice tells me that these trees and their crumbling planter boxes will soon be removed, to be replaced with something more suited to the street’s current uses.
I wander onwards, enjoying the rare sunshine, and enter into an area of the street that is dominated by businesses owned and patronised by the area’s Greek community. The outdoor seating brings life back to the footpath, and as I pass through I sometimes imagine these customers are the children and grandchildren of the men who gather in the Plaza. However, these are not quaint ethnic establishments that offer opportunities to use food as a mediator between different ethnic groups, but instead large cafes and restaurants with modern fit-outs that appear to appeal to a broad target market and capitalise on the omnivorous nature of Australian cuisine. In many ways, the ethnicity of these businesses owners and many patrons appears secondary to their promotion of sociality as consumption-based; this reminds me that the middle class is a broad demographic that shares a range of generalised consumption practices, deployed in different ways. However, their offering does not appeal to me, and as I negotiate the customers dining on the footpath I am reminded of the specificity of my own consumption preferences, and of the extent to which this segments the different users of the street.

I continue down the street past cafes, takeaways, professional services and a shop selling music posters. It replaced a business that, in what appeared to be a bet on the area’s gentrification played too early, sold upmarket furniture and interior design elements. Nearby a small bar recently took on the name of an older pub that was knocked down for the construction of Northcote Central. The original Carters Arms served labourers from the brickworks that previously occupied the site where the Plaza now stands. The new Carters Public House seems to appeal to a relatively
mainstream middle class customer, with a mix of sports and acoustic music and a subtly casual interior. I wonder, as I pass, if these customers would recognise this nod to history without the helpful guidance of the business’ website – one that I first learnt through my reading for this research – and what the area’s older residents who remember the earlier incarnation think of this projection of history. High Street is full of these moments of the future and the past coming together in this way; however, the effectiveness of these symbolic projections in constructing a narrative of identity is less clear.

Figure Thirteen: High Street in the past, present, and future

The daily movement of people is layered over the cycles of time created by the built form and the shifting commercial uses that give these buildings their current purpose. During peak hour, or as the nearby schools begin and end, the footpaths are alive with transiting pedestrians, whilst the road itself is a constant stream of trams and cars – despite the Council’s attempt to discourage through-traffic by restricting the speed limit. The varying opening and closing times of the businesses that structure the street’s day and night economy add further layers, both temporally and spatially dispersing types of usage and users, despite the similarities of our behaviours. During the daytime I sometimes see a small group of middle aged men gathered outside the sports betting shop to smoke cigarettes and drink beer from brown paper bags. Across the road during the evening, larger groups of younger men and women similarly gather outside bars and music venues to smoke cigarettes – their beers left inside at the insistence of the bouncer. The weather, of course, mediates all of these behaviours; the environment’s imposition perhaps offers the
most effective means of constructing connections between disparate groups of people as they huddle under awnings, and in limiting interaction altogether.

I approach another significant interchange space. This is marked by a pub built in the 1850s that is now a destination music venue, a small supermarket, a bank, an old Italian greengrocer who now mainly sells flowers, a tram stop, two minor intersecting roads with adjacent parking spaces, and a pedestrian crossing. I glance at, but do not acknowledge, a person I am familiar with from my patronage of my favourite cafe and bar. As I rarely see friends or acquaintances in the public spaces of the street, one might expect I would welcome this disruption to the constrained sociality of this space. However, when removed from the identity cues constructed by the physical and symbolic elements of the consumption space, and the rituals of service that frames interaction within it, I feel less certain of the basis of this acquaintance. This is because within the fragmented and mostly transitory space of High Street, the constantly shifting realms blur the spatial and cultural anchors to these identifications. Is this acknowledgement based on our recognition of mutual acquaintances and shared consumption preferences established within anchoring realms? Can it be extrapolated to a recognition of a broader sharing of neighbourhood space? In this fleeting moment of uncertainty, I revert to norms of civil inattention and continue on my way.

This is not to suggest that High Street is devoid of interaction; instead, such interaction is more likely to reinforce its role as a space of consumption-based individual- or cultural group-specific identity definition. High Street does generally feel like a space where the work required to uphold the norms of public interaction seem to hover just below the surface. This is not an easy and freeing anonymity, such as offered by the Plaza, where I have no expectation of interaction with those with whom I share the space. Instead, it is one that feels awkward, and loaded with the expectation of primary and intimate-secondary relations, both past and anticipated. Thus, as I glance into shop windows in a habit that has established routines of greeting with some businesses owners, I feel pleased at the personal recognition, and at its public expression. Yet at other times I consciously strive to break this habit of greeting, as if I am not certain of the altruism of my motives, or
feel that this public display is somehow out of place in this mostly socially expressionless space.

Figure Fourteen: Empty public space

In part the lack of obvious sociality in High Street is due to the physical characteristics of the space itself. A busy road and rows of parked cars divide the narrow footpaths, and separate pedestrian traffic in ways that can both enhance and decrease the visibility of pedestrians. Those on the other side of the road barely register, whilst those who share my path are difficult to ignore. However, this configuration of space and objects also heightens the street’s potential as one of personal display, such that embodied practices can become markers of presence, and belonging. Simple activities such as crossing the road outside of regulated pedestrian crossings can be a moment of unintended impression management. This is because the design and busyness of High Street often both requires and encourages pedestrians to pause in the middle, displaying their presence to onlookers in cars, cafes, and on the footpaths. Sometimes it feels like a display of ownership, at other times an unwanted announcement of my movements and intentions. Nonetheless, as I pause there to look for traffic and trams, I experience a momentary feeling of belonging, as the open space of the road allows for a more complete view of the High Street precinct and a more coherent sense of the places I have passed through.
In many ways this experience sums up much of what the public spaces of High Street offer: oscillation between desire for a recognition of belonging, and an experience of anonymity that is as much a product of the physical and symbolic environment as it is social. This fluidity of identifications is reinforced as I enter into the gentrified precinct, identifiable by a shift in architecture and atmosphere: the smaller Victorian and Edwardian shopfronts that remain from Northcote’s earlier eras dominate the built form, and the more gentrified businesses that fill them shape its symbolic landscape. I feel my self-awareness also begin to shift in expectation of reaching my destination, and in preparation for who I might see there. At this point I might enter the cafe whose owner, staff, and some other customers I have become familiar with over time. Or I may go to the bar that has come to operate as my neighbourhood third place. Or sometimes to the hairdresser who, amongst other topics of conversation, tells me about the happenings on the street. In doing so, I leave the public space of the street and the shifting realms constructed by its multiple trajectories; I enter into spaces that anchor me within this place, through commercial friendships, cultural group identifications, and consumption offerings that express my individual identity.

It is the offerings of these spaces that most clearly define the High Street experience: a collection of anchoring realms that frame its collective sociality according to their cultural group specificity. This sociality is one that is mostly only glimpsed at – through shop windows, in footpath seating areas, or as people stop briefly to speak on the street. This is less rubbing along of diverse people in public space, and more reinforcing of established relationships and identifications. My movements through

*Chapter Seven: Constructing Community Through Everyday Movements*
High Street construct a realm of exposure to the area’s diversity as one of similar difference. They achieve this by juxtaposing these segregated but similar social practices with the street’s diverse yet historically definable architecture and temporarily variant yet still patterned movements of people and traffic. The value of High Street in this respect, then, is its ability to emplace the individual within an exposure realm that offers its users the ability to continually renegotiate their relationship to it, whether that be through fleeting moments of interaction, embodied experiences of belonging afforded by visual cues, or of aloneness as the sole user of an empty footpath who has the knowledge that they have somewhere familiar to go.

**Conclusion: Throwing together shared ordinariness and similar difference**

This chapter has drawn on my everyday movements in and through the public and quasi-public spaces of my neighbourhood to explore the ways our everyday experiences of the physical, social and symbolic elements of such spaces can be taken into account in investigations of neighbourhood-based community. To do so I have drawn on the work of Amin on the potential of multiplicity to support collective culture and Massey’s theorisation of space as thrown together, and sought to explore how this can be applied through Aubert-Gamet and Cova’s concept of exposure sites. Research has recognised the potential for open and lightly regulated public and quasi-public spaces, such as markets and shopping centres, to support light touch sociality and civic culture in general. However, this chapter sought to explore the manner in which that exposure may construct links between different individuals or groups of people that specifically relates to a third identity – that of the neighbourhood in which those spaces are situated.

In this chapter I proposed the concept of an exposure realm as a moment in space and time where physical, social, and symbolic elements come together in ways that are experienced as a moment of collective encounter with diverse others. Then I explored the application of this through my own everyday experiences of exposure. To do so, I have focused on the two key public spaces of my neighbourhood that both offer potential as realms of exposure, yet in very different ways. I also sought to consider the ways that experiences across these spaces became linked in an
experience of place-based community by following the trajectory of my walking route from my house, through the Plaza, and down High Street.

As this chapter has described, High Street communicates the diversity of the neighbourhood through the symbolic projections of its built form, the shifting range of offerings of the businesses within it, and the ebb and flow of uses according to time of day. It is a space of movement at different speeds of time, not only because it is a busy arterial road, but also because it is in flux – like the neighbourhood itself. This movement constructs geographic connections to the places that lie at end of the routes of the people, cars, trams, and roads, as well as to other times: older buildings are renovated, planter boxes crumble, and new business make references to the past, and the future, through their physical and symbolic elements and value offerings. In that respect, then, much of High Street’s potential to operate as a realm of exposure relies on these memory traces and projections.

High Street is also a space where the work of negotiating the throwntogetherness feels most apparent, highlighted by hoped-for disruptions that do not manifest, or that trigger a retreat into patterns of ordering, and where belonging can be experienced through embodied actions that reinforce connections to the physical and symbolic rather than the social. It is not surprising, then, that in such a context people seek to engage with others and with places that are most like them, creating a series of fragmented spaces that project the identities, consumption preferences, and gathering practices of the area’s different cultural groups. Of course, unlike the Plaza, the diversity of High Street businesses allows this choice, supporting the expression of distinct cultural identities. At the same, differentiation’s location within specific businesses, rather than within the public spaces of the street, limits the potential for exposure across social and cultural groups in the ways that may domesticate this diversity.

The Plaza, in contrast, provides space for a diverse range of people to be in, anonymously, but together. Through its generic built form and consumption offering, it provides a stable, everyday shopping experience where ethnic and socio-economic differences are reduced to that of ordinary Plaza consumer. As with many shopping centres, its design and symbolic projections are intended to enclose, yet in doing so the Plaza constructs a realm that is experienced as separate from the cars,
roads, parks, and weather that surround it. Instead one’s senses are captured by the thoroughly ordinary situated multiplicity of this everyday shopping centre, and the ordered and domesticated ballet of trajectories that this constructs.

The Plaza version of exposure does not promise identification through social interaction; encounters with acquaintances tend to be brief – nods or smiles – yet quick conversations in passing or during service encounters bring fleeting moments of joy. Yet this space is not so constrained that it prevents breaches in its instrumentality, as the appropriation of one section by a group of elderly men for their own social purposes demonstrates. In doing so, they contribute to an experience of easy rubbing along in space that does not differentiate based on age, gender or ethnicity, instead requiring only one’s presence in the Plaza’s never ending now. The power of this exposure realm is such that the Plaza has become a site to which I feel a great deal of attachment, as I have territorialised and emplaced its people and spaces into my construction of neighbourhood-based identity.

By themselves, these spaces could be read as epitomising the negative impacts of gentrification and the privatisation of public space; they offer collective identification either in the form of the anonymity of consumption, or the specificity of a cultural group. Together, however, these public spaces communicate the area’s diversity and the different cultural practices of its specific groups, whilst also providing a stable environment in which to share everyday behaviours and attachments. High Street provides a physical and symbolic anchor around which to build an experience of Northcote, supported by the convenience of ordinary consumption offering of the Plaza. At the same time, the Plaza’s banality and lowest common denominator identification offers an experience of belonging that is a contrast to the cultural group specificity of many of the High Street consumption spaces – such that each can offer a respite from the other.

This chapter has sought to foreground this interplay between these spaces, and the ways they are combined through the habitual routes and consumption practices and preferences of residents, myself included. As Amin argues, our negotiations of the throwntogetherness of the urban environment can create opportunities to construct tacit experiences of encounter, and to embed meaning into place. Through my negotiations of the juxtaposition of different built forms, histories, consumption
practices, and modes of gathering that are brought together through my patterns of movement, I create a series of connections: between the histories and trajectories of Plaza and the High Street, and between the different groups of people who use these spaces in the similar ways. In doing so I create my own Northcote exposure realm, manifest through a throwntogether understanding of these distinct but related spaces, which I invest with a specific public culture that has come to define my experiences of and in this place.

Chapter Seven Conclusion and Postscript: Reversing movement and exposure

Somewhere between completing the proposal and draft version of this chapter, and the final version presented here, I moved house. I still remain within the Northcote area and in close proximity to both High Street and Northcote Plaza; however, the location of my new residence has effectively reversed the direction of my movements, and restructured the everyday practices that had established around them. Now instead of casually wandering through the Plaza on my way to High Street’s bars and cafes, I stroll around the corner to the High Street’s gentrified offerings, and make special trips up the street to reach the Plaza. This reversal in my patterns of movement has had a significant impact on the way I view these spaces. Whilst the Plaza remains a site to which I feel great attachment and an appreciation of its ordinariness, and High Street a site that offers opportunities for anchoring and appreciation of the area’s diversity, the manner in which these spaces combine into an experience of neighbourhood has altered. Now, as I walk through High Street to reach the Plaza I more keenly feel the emptiness of its footpaths, the drag of the faster movement from the road, and the uncertainty created by the unstable business environment as shops continue to open and close. This is perhaps because, once I have passed through the gentrified precinct with which I most closely identify, I face an ever deteriorating aesthetic: heritage architecture and boutique consumption offerings give way to yellow concrete box stores, kebab shops and pawn brokers, falling apart tree planters – a very different experience to walking through residential streets and parks.
Upon reaching the Plaza, I still experience the welcome embrace of its collective anonymity, and am pleased to see the Greek men gathering in their familiar places, and look forward to passing the Chinese massage store, which I no longer do regularly. However, when I leave to return home with my shopping, passing back through Northcote Central’s grey spaces and back down High Street in the familiar southerly direction my sense of openness to my environment has altered. Perhaps this is simply because the shopping bags are heavy, reminding me I am not a flaneur, or off to seek anchoring in a familiar cafe or bar, but am instead just carrying my shopping through this cold, grey, and empty street. It may also be because this expression of ordinary consumption feels somewhat out of place in this more lifestyle-focused area, accentuating the banality of this version of domesticating space through habitual routes. What is most clear is the importance of the ordering of these spaces as they were thrown together in my construction of neighbourhood, and the ease with which this can be disrupted. Subsequently, I mostly drive to the Plaza now, turning High Street into a space viewed through my car window. This inscribes additional patterns of movement over the spaces that define my relationship to this neighbourhood.

Returning to the questions of the thesis, this chapter emphasises the ways habitual use of public and quasi-public space can structure the imagining of community. As discussed within the literature review, habitual practices have been proposed as a means through which the individual both constructs the social imaginary, and uses that imaginary as a means of differentiating the individual. This chapter outlines the manner in which these habits can support the construction of memory traces that are embedded with an imagined presence. They are able to do so by territorialising and emplacing a multitude of trajectories in ways that construct spatial and temporal links between people and things. This is best exemplified by my repeated encounters with the men who anchor in the Plaza, and the presence of a diverse yet anchored community that I have embedded within this fleeting yet recurrent exposure. That is, in observing my anchoring practices (or desires for) as they are played out as the habits of others, I become more aware of the value of those habits to my construction of my self. However, through this process of comparative imagining I also incorporate this expression of identification through anchoring as a shared practice of the imagined community.
However, non-human elements – such as the juxtaposition of past and present within the architecture and business offerings of High Street – are also able to take on and project the imagined presence. Whereas within the Plaza, it is the stability of habitual practices that support the presence, within High Street the power of disruptions become more apparent. This is not only through fleeting disruptions, such as rain, or crossing paths with a familiar face, but also those that unfold at a slower pace of time, such as changes in business types, the crumbling of a planter box, or a government sponsored streetscaping project that tears up footpaths and reconfigures the road space. I suggest that this latter aspect is significant because these slower-moving disruptions can work to normalise change. That is, the possibility of disruptions – and the ways they highlight the habitual practices that construct the imagined community – are themselves able to be reflexively incorporated into the construction of the ever-evolving imaginary.

Finally, this chapter also speaks to questions raised by Valentine and Sadgrove (2012) of the longer-term meaningfulness of fleeting interactions with people and things, and discussed within the methodology as a benefit of the longitudinal autoethnographic approach adopted for this thesis. As this chapter has discussed, fleeting everyday encounters with people and things can come to be embedded with additional layers of meaning when they are incorporated into habitual practices, or recognised as disruptions to them. That is, fleeting encounters can have greater meaningfulness when they trigger memory traces, and are able to be emplaced within an imaginary that these habits and memories have constructed. In that respect, then, when we attribute community-building value to fleeting interactions, such as with affective communities, we may be taking for granted a deeper process of imagining that constructs connections from those interactions to others – both past, and yet to happen. The relationship between memory traces that such interactions may trigger, and the ways they can shape current imaginings, is explored in more detail in the following chapter.
Chapter Eight
Imagining Neighbourhood-Based Community

The earlier chapters of this thesis have focused on the public and quasi-public spaces of my neighbourhood, and the ways my experiences within them have contributed to the processes of imagining community. This final data chapter focuses on the core concept of imagined community; it addresses the question of how consumption practices and experiences in the public and quasi-public spaces that frame them can be experienced as projecting the imagined presence of neighbourhood-based community. In doing so, this chapter also provides a summative conceptualisation of the research of the thesis. Because of this, this chapter does not end with an additional conclusion. Instead, chapter nine explores the implications of this chapter’s theorisation of imagining community.

This chapter has been submitted to the journal Space and Culture, published by Sage. Space and Culture is an interdisciplinary journal that publishes work from areas such as cultural geography, sociology, cultural studies, ethnography and urban studies. It is because of this specific focus on the intersection of issues of space with cultural studies that this journal was chosen as an appropriate publication outlet for the chapter. Space and Culture was ranked 11/35 in cultural studies and 59/73 in geography, with an impact factor of 0.4, according to Thomson Reuters Journal citation reports.

Introduction

This paper investigates the process of imagining neighbourhood-based community, and considers the ways that we construct the objects and shared practices that unite them. Using autoethnographic research, I reflect on my experiences of seeking the belonging of place-based community within a gentrifying inner city neighbourhood in Melbourne, Australia. These are spaces that can be described as having a throwntogetherness: where place-based meaning is constructed through moments of
encounter, and where there can be no assumptions of a pre-given coherence of identity (Amin, 2008; Massey, 2005). To understand collective identification within such contexts, it has been argued that greater attention needs to be paid to both the non-human and the immaterial (e.g., Amin & Thrift, 2002; Urry, 2000). That is, how the city’s hidden and visible material elements, along with its imaginative and affective immaterial elements, combine with human interactions to construct and constrain our collective identifications. In this paper I aim to contribute to this understanding by focusing on the imaginative aspect, and considering its role in the construction of community within this throwntogetherness.

To do so, this paper draws on theories of the imagination and its relation to community (e.g., Benedict Anderson, 2006; Urry, 2000) to develop a framework through which to explore my own experience of imagining community within an inner city neighbourhood. In particular the paper focuses on the critical and fascinated imagination (Ricoeur, 1994), and considers their role in the construction of the objects and shared practices that structure imagined communities. This process, I describe, begins with an imagining of neighbourhood as a place-based extension of the self, an identity I affirm as an experience of belonging to community. To do so, I searched for positive and negative experiences of interaction and identification with people and things for their potential to operate as the objects and shared practices of the community I had imagined. This was characterised by experiences that disrupted my fascinated imaginings, leading me to question the orientation and motives of those imaginings, and to reflexively reframe them according to different spaces and reference groups. In doing so I sought to emplace an imagined community within a broader neighbourhood space, whilst affirming a place-identity that more closely reflected the varying aspects of my self. In this way, then, the underlying aspect of imagining community is one of negotiation – with people and spaces, but mostly with the self. The following section outlines the initial theorisation that frames this exploration of imagining neighbourhood-based community.
Theorising the Imagining of Community

The concept of imagined communities was first introduced by Benedict Anderson to describe how nation states were able to present a collective culture and identity (2006). According to Anderson, the imagining process allows community members to overlook discrepancies in an individual’s interpretation and use of the symbols of community, and in the ways members experience the values that define it. This paper particularly draws on Urry’s (2000) discussion of belonging within contemporary societies where he similarly argues that objects can create symbolic links that can cross time, space, uneven social relations, and categorical differences. According to Urry, this is possible because objects carry memory traces that stimulate and structure people’s imaginings. In doing so, they are also able to communicate what he terms an imagined presence of community, even when members may not be fully conscious this community exists. These objects may range from the monumental, such as buildings, landscapes, and institutionalised symbols, to the more ordinary, like trees or pathways. Importantly it is the meaning embedded into the object, rather than the object itself, that constructs the community.

This relationship between symbols and community has been well established within research. Anderson (2006) proposed that simultaneous actions, or the objects that represent them, could underpin national communities. In his theory of the symbolic construction of community, Cohen argued for the importance of symbols in affirming community membership and boundaries (1985). Similarly, research on consumer communities demonstrates that value extracted from products and services can reinforce individual and collective identities (e.g., Cova, et al., 2007; Holbrook, 1999). This collective identification is established as these value experiences are shared, such that “the link is more important than the thing” (Cova, 1997, p. 307). These theories, then, recognise the potential of identity-defining value to be embedded within or projected onto objects or actions. However, with the terminology of the imagined presence, I suggest Urry most clearly captures the essence of the simultaneous action and the power of the link, in that it is experienced as being present and yet is also imagined. In doing so, Urry’s concept also hints at
the role of the imagination in the construction of this presence, which is explored in more detail in the following section.

**The Critical and Fascinated Imagining of Community**

To explore how the presence of imagined community is constructed, this paper looks to theories on the processes of the imagination. In particular I draw on Ricoeur’s (1994) distinction between reproductive and productive imagination, and the relation of the latter to the critical and fascinated consciousness. According to Ricoeur, the absence or presence of the imagining’s subject distinguishes the reproductive from the productive. Imagining an absent subject is deemed reproductive because the image is merely a trace of the real. Imagining as fiction or fantasy is deemed productive because it creates a presence that is not real, but is experienced as if it is.

Ricoeur also describes the processes of the imagination according to whether or not the subject is capable of a critical awareness of the difference between the imaginary and the real (1994). He terms these the critical and fascinated consciousness, in order to describe the difference between imagining as reflexivity, and as fantasy or delusion. The fascinated consciousness is less able to recognise imagination’s role in the creation of fiction than the critical consciousness, which reflexively draws on those imaginings to critique reality. This paper applies this distinction to explore the reflexive fantasy of imagining community.

The association of community with fantasy is familiar in community theory (Delanty, 2003), and which Bauman (2001) in particular argues means that our quests for community are ultimately unachievable. This is because what Bauman terms really existing community cannot match the ideals of our projections, setting up an unresolvable tension between community and individualism. The insecurity generated by these unsatisfied fantasies also points to the manner in which our emotions are implicated within these projections. This is possible because the productive imagination creates a presence that *feels* real, despite its fictional nature. Thus we can argue that the emotions that become attached to achieving community (or failing to) are as much an element of imagining community as the desire for an experience of belonging.
At the same time, however, theories of imagination argue that we are also able to use our productive imagination to critically reflect on reality. Our habits and the way we react to their expression by others is one way that these projections may be made visible according to Hanson (1986). To do so, we draw on an anonymous they as a generalised perspective on values or modes of behaviour against which to benchmark that imagining. Conversely, however, as is suggested in Anderson’s (2006) theory, and also by Castoriadis (1994) and Taylor (2004), the symbols and norms of these social imaginaries are themselves constructed through the imaginings of its individual members. That is, we draw on the (imagined) shared values and norms of a specific community, or society, to make assessments of our own behaviours (or imaginings), which themselves constitute the imagined community.

In that respect, then, whilst our imaginings of community may be fictional, and prone to idealistic fantasy at times, these fantasises themselves play a role in the construction of the social imaginary against which they are evaluated. And whilst some authors argue this sets our dreams of community up for constant disappointment, others suggest that our awareness of the construction itself allows us to appreciate the ephemeral nature of the experience of belonging. The rest of this paper draws on my own experiences of seeking belonging within an Australian inner city neighbourhood to explore the process through which the reflexive and fascinated imagination may work in the construction of imagined community.

To do so, it focuses on the role of the object and shared practices, and explores the manner in which the imagined presence is embedded within them. As consumer researchers suggest, this may begin with individual identity definition, and the sharing of identity-defining value, which may – here I draw on Urry’s theories – work to embed meaning, or a presence into objects and spaces. However this is clearly a subjective process, constructed through both the critical and fascinated consciousness. It is this subjective determination that this paper explores: to trace the manner in which consumption practices and the public and quasi-public spaces that frame them can be experienced as projecting the imagined presence of neighbourhood-based community.
Research Methodology and Context

To explore the imagining of neighbourhood-based community, I draw on my autoethnographic investigation of my attempt to construct an experience of community in the suburb of Northcote in Melbourne. I moved here in May 2008, with limited knowledge or experience of the area, or of Melbourne as a whole, and no established social networks to provide connections into the community. My decision to move to Northcote was informed by assessments on rental affordability, proximity to public transport and the central business district, and assumptions about local amenities and culture (all determined through online searches). However, my choice of this area over other neighbourhoods offering similar access and facilities was mostly driven by an uninformed yet intuitive certainty that the neighbourhood would suit me. From the very beginning, then, my experiences of Northcote have been based on imaginative projections.

However Northcote is also a neighbourhood without a clearly definable or singular identity, evidenced by the not particularly unique values summarised in the relevant planning policy as “social and cultural tolerance, affordable housing and business rentals, diversity in people and spaces and a ‘down to earth’ sense of place and being” (Ecologically Sustainable Design & Alphaplan, 2007, p. 26). Its diverse, although increasingly middle class population includes 25% who were born outside Australia or who speak a language other than English at home (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012f). Northcote also has higher than city-wide averages of residents with Greek or Italian backgrounds, increasing numbers of couple families with children, and decreasing numbers of lone person households (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012f). These demographic differences are reflected in its amenities. They include a shopping centre that offers everyday goods and services, and a lifestyle-focused main street that targets specific cultural groups through its differentiated consumer offerings. That is, as Amin and Thrift argue regarding cities more generally (2002), this is a neighbourhood that is best described as projecting a range of identities through its physical elements, population, and consumption offerings. In doing so, it also features numerous objects that offer the potential to support and constrain the imagining of community within it.
This research adopted an autoethnographic methodology. This methodology draws on an individual’s experience to reflexively explore subjective processes, and to construct narratives that illustrate the negotiation of meaning (Ellis, 2004; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). It was applied here as the most appropriate methodology through which to explore imagining a presence of community within a place of unfixed identities. Seeing into another’s imaginative space is clearly problematic, and attempting to understand how that imagination pieces together fragments of identity into an experience of belonging even more so. Yet autoethnography offers the methodological tools through which to make those imaginative projections visible, and available as a tool for readers to reflect on their own experiences. This paper aims, then, to not only explicate my own processes of imagining community, but also do so in a manner that may shape the imagining of others.

Data collection took the form of extensive memo writing as recommended by Ellis (2004), with a focus on my actions and interactions within the High Street retail precinct and Northcote Plaza, the neighbourhood shopping centre. These two consumption precincts have played distinct but equally important roles in my experience of identifying with and becoming attached to my neighbourhood. This is because the distinct lifestyle and everyday offerings of the spaces overall, as well as of individual businesses within them, have facilitated both personal and collective identification. As noted above, these spaces also physically and symbolically communicate different aspects of the neighbourhood’s identities and cultures. In doing so, they offer a range of opportunities to support my imagining of this community as diverse and accepting. These specific spaces and my experiences in them have been described in detail elsewhere (Hall, 2010, 2011). In this paper I focus on the processes of imagining that worked to connect these consumption-based, identity-defining experiences into an imagined presence of community.

Place-Identification and the Beginnings of Imagining Community

The importance of the physical, symbolic and discursive elements of the city in shaping tacit collective experiences has been increasingly emphasised in sociology and geography (e.g., Amin, 2008; Amin & Thrift, 2002; Latham & McCormack,
2004). This research confirms this importance, not only in recognising the manner that physical objects can come to symbolise community through the imagined presence, but also the ways that non-human elements support the construction of a place-based identity that forms the basis of that imagining. In this section then, I explore this place identification as it is constructed through the negotiation of physical, symbolic and discursive elements of space, and as it seems to abstract the social elements.

As noted above, I moved to Northcote with established ideas about the nature of this neighbourhood and expectations regarding its ability to reflect my identity; I had already begun to develop a sense of place identification. It is unsurprising, then, that within a relatively short period of time of living in the area, I was already expressing my attachment. The quote below demonstrates this, written after being here for six months, and after spending a pleasant afternoon in a local pub with a visiting relative.

… I’m conscious that I was really enjoying myself, and felt quite comfortable and ‘in place’ while I was there. … I could surmise that I’m pretty happy with Northcote; I like it as a place, it offers me the kind of things I am looking for in a suburb, and like to do. I just don’t do much of them at present. … My attachment to Northcote as a place feels a bit abstract … I respond to the built environment and the collective servicescape and the value offerings of individual servicescapes – but it is not really related to people as real people. They are just people in the abstract. (Research notes, 29th October 2008)

As this research memo describes, I was extracting identity-defining value from my experience within that consumption space; I felt comfortable and “in place”. I also recognised the fit between the offerings of the neighbourhood and my desired place identity. Yet my identification and attachment mostly draws from aspects of the built and symbolic environment, manifest as the streetscape and the businesses that it comprises. I have created an image of Northcote based on my relation to its physical spaces, and the value they offer me, but feel that the social elements remain abstract.
The extent to which I integrated that identity is clear in the following quote, where I demonstrate a critical awareness of the role of consumption spaces in the construction of “my life in Northcote”, and recognise the value in having that identity affirmed by another.

I was thinking about the guided tour I will give [my friend] on Tuesday. Rehearsing it really. And realised the things I plan to show him are all consumption-related. In part my intention is to give him the information he requires so he can be self-sufficient. Or at least so I can send him out on errands ... But really it would be a tour of where I go, and what I do, more than what he can do. … A guided tour of my life in Northcote, my place-based identity. (Research notes, 26th March 2009)

However, I suggest that this experience of place identification developed through the physical and symbolic is not the same as an experience of community, which I argue requires an element of social connection. My personal belief in such a distinction is evident throughout my research notes, where I acknowledge my identification with place, but grapple to identify shared values or a feeling of social connection to accompany it. This was demonstrated in my feeling of the social as abstract in the research note of 29th October above, and also below.

I really like, and feel like I identify with Northcote as a place, and will continue to do so for a while – as in I could live here for years. But identifying with place and being a part of a community are not the same thing. Need to explore why, I think. (Research notes, 18th October 2008)

I propose that this is because, when constructing place through our encounters with space, the social remains in the abstract; that place is a product of the imagination. This has been suggested within some theories of imagination: that when we create images of places in our mind they are devoid of people (Brann, 1991; Casey, 1976). Brann suggests this is because these imagined places are waiting to be (or already are) invested with the being of the imaginer (1991). Such a proposal echoes place attachment theory’s perspective of place as an extension of the self (Belk, 1992; Low...
& Altman, 1992), and suggests a differentiation between identification with physical place, and a social connection. However, whilst place attachment theory recognises the role of physical and social elements, research on their comparative importance or interrelations is less clear (see Lewicka, 2011 for an overview).

In this paper I suggest a layered process, which draws firstly on identification with physical characteristics to construct a place image within the imagination. Then, over time, as an individual becomes embedded within its social networks or the everyday sociality of its public spaces, this image is emotionally invested with a social conception of the self within that place. In some respects such a progression seems intuitive: extracting meaning from encounters with symbols and physical objects requires less emotional risk and investment than social interaction. It is also in line with Lewicka’s suggestion that physical elements may act as magnets that draw people to places, and social elements may act as anchors that encourage people to stay (2011). The remainder of this paper explores this cumulative and fragmented process by considering the interplay between the critical and fascinated consciousness as it searches for objects and shared practices in which to embed the experience of belonging to community.

**Searching for Objects: The problem of the social**

Theories of imagined community tell us that communities unite around shared identities and values that can be expressed materially through objects and shared practices. However, determining these cues is a subjective process that can be difficult to account for, because those identities and values are as likely to be a reflection of the individual as they are of the collective. In the previous section I described ways that physical and symbolic elements may be drawn on to construct an image of a place as an extension of the self. This section considers how the social element, the people of the community, may be imagined to be emplaced within that.

As noted above, I quickly established Northcote, and specific spaces within it, as an extension of my identity. Within weeks of arriving I had established preferred shops and habitual pathways that remain emplaced within my image of this neighbourhood. Yet despite the attachment to physical place, I struggled to situate
that within a social representation, either as a social imaginary to which I could broadly attribute values and shared practices, or a more personal local social network that research has shown may substitute for neighbouring (Savage, et al., 2005).

I’ve been thinking about Northcote as a community. Firstly if Northcote is a community? And if so what are the defining shared values of the area? I’ve been wondering about this because I am beginning to see the social networks and wondering if they are only social networks, not a community. (Research notes, 8th December 2008)

Of course, many theories of contemporary society would argue against distinct underlying shared values; places are unfixed, and their identities constructed in moments of negotiation based on personal life histories rather than shared values (e.g., Amin & Thrift, 2002; Massey, 2005; Urry, 2000). Furthermore, as discussed above, Northcote is a neighbourhood where demographic diversity and geography seem to combine in ways that work against definable distinction; its down to earth sense of place is perhaps more suited to supporting individualised place attachment or elective belonging than community. Yet this search for a social experience was a prominent feature in my research notes, and closely related to questions regarding the possibility of an experience of community.

I draw insight into this questioning from theories of imagining, and the role of the social imaginary as a benchmark for social norms. As discussed above, this reflexive use of imagining aids critical awareness, because it facilitates evaluation of individual imaginings. Yet, without a clear concept of a neighbourhood they against which to benchmark the place-based identity I was constructing, I was having difficulty determining the social norms against which to make those assessments. Attempts at this kind of reflexive imagining are evident in the following research memos. The first records my thoughts on an evening in a familiar bar where a conversation led to an enjoyable night in the company of regulars.

What would it take for that night to make me feel ‘community’? Seeing those people again in different places and being remembered … But that’s social network, not community. So being seen [by one person] to be recognised [by another] and thus associated? ... Again
that would mainly have social network impact rather than community impact. The difference is an absence (?) of the underlying community value thing. Or at least my failure to be able to articulate it. (Research notes, 24th January 2009)

In this memo I am grappling with the difference between community and social networks. Despite recognising the theoretical difference, I still attempt to imagine how that may be experienced: by being seen to be recognised by specific others. In my case, this is linked to a desire for recognition from those within a social network I encountered across a number of consumption spaces, as will be discussed in the following section. However, I suggest it also demonstrates the reflexive work involved in the imagining of community, as I search for affirmation of my place-based extension of self in the social practices of a broader collective.

This is also evident in the following excerpt, which describes my response to a newspaper article featuring a High Street trader selling “I love Northcote” t-shirts. The memo also reflects on conversations with people I met at a party, few of whom were Northcote residents. As this reflection on my responses to others’ expressions of identification demonstrates, even when presented with statements of community I continued to have difficulty relating those representations to my own imaginings.

… it didn’t really inspire any empathetic ‘I love Northcote too’ response (although I’ve been telling people that I’ve met [at party] that I really like Northcote) … the quote was ‘I love the diversity here, I love that there’s a community spirit here. It’s like a country town with the benefits of being close to the city.’ I read that but I don’t see it. And it seems to me that you don’t go around saying something is like a country town unless you have experienced it being that way.

Which brings me back to social networks. If you have established social networks in the area you also have possible bridging ties, and that broader network of acquaintances … can come to stand for the community. As [party attendee] said, she lived here for a bit and knew two people who lived here, and to her it felt like a community.
The social networks made the community real. What does that mean for the separation of social networks and community? Does it imply that the second only becomes apparent when the first is established? And established to what degree? (Research notes, 26th February 2009)

As a researcher of community actively searching for community this difficulty in determining the structure of the collective against which to evaluate my imaginings was surprising, and highlights the complexity in determining a they within the fluid environment of the contemporary city. I suggest this sheds light on the association of local friendship networks and place-based belonging. In their discussion of elective belonging, Savage et al. (2005) argue social networks can stand in for neighbouring in ways that reinforce place-based belonging. This potential is similarly suggested in theories of place attachment that argue that social attachment can work as an anchor (Lewicka, 2011). Yet I arrived in this neighbourhood without established social networks, and in many respects this potential to reinforce place identification operated as a barrier to my imagining of community. This is because I was unable to effectively use this social network to affirm the place-image I had constructed, despite the attempts to do so that this section has described. As the following section discusses, this was exacerbated by my previous experiences and ideas of community formation.

**Searching for Objects: The problem of memory traces**

As argued within the literature review and discussion above, our determinations of community are relational; they draw on reflexive assessments of experiences against those observed in a broader collective. However, these assessments also draw on what Urry (2000) terms memory traces: recollections of previous experiences that are projected into our reflections of now (see also Massey, 2005). This definitional potential is clear when we consider the manner in which buildings or history can be bound into a mythology that projects a nation’s shared identity or values. This section considers how personal histories may colour our experiences in similar ways, as imaginative projections.
As noted, I moved to the area with limited experience of its culture and no social connections to facilitate easy introductions. This did not mean I had no expectations; my intuitive certainty that the area would suit me was itself an imaginative projection. I had an expectation regarding the manner in which this place, of which I had only limited experience, would socially and culturally satisfy my sense of self. However, this lack of directly accessible experience meant I drew on memories of elsewhere and, in particular, my ideas on neighbourhood-based community that were developed over seven years of living in an area with a strong, publically expressed community (Hall, 2008).

Whilst the research I conducted within my old neighbourhood inspired some of the theoretical assumptions upon which this autoethnography was based, it also embedded habits and expectations regarding the manner in which neighbourhood and community would be expressed within public and quasi-public space. Drawing on this history, I had hypothesised that practices of public sociality and greeting were reasonable evidence of community. Whilst I allowed that this interaction would most likely be fleeting and superficial, it nonetheless had a shared element, termed localness recognition in my earlier research, in that it was required to be mutual. The influence of these assumptions are evident in the following quote.

I’m going places and seeing people I’m able to link to other places in Northcote. Maybe not immediately, but I am beginning to make those connections. But it’s not me recognising people that is going to make me feel like I am ‘of here’ – it’s people recognising me. And as yet – beyond the neighbour, who doesn’t really count – that has not happened. (Research notes, 8th February 2009)

As this quote also implies, I constructed expectations as to whom recognition as a symbol of imagined community needed to be from. Neighbours don’t count, presumably because that recognition is based on different levels of obligation due to proximity. Instead, as the quote below suggests, those people whom I had constructed as ‘counting’ where those I encountered in the High Street consumption spaces I regularly patronised. The following note was written after leaving a cafe that I had visited to have breakfast and work, and where I had engaged in pleasant routinised interaction with staff who were familiar to me.
As I left [the cafe] I wondered if I had reached a sort of plateau in terms of building connections. Thin smiles and general hellos is about all I’m going to get without some sort of catalyst that serves to pass on some personal information. … the relationship I have with [these] people is categorical, I am a customer and that’s about all. Without some other connection/person/incident to make me more than that, then that is all it will be. Is this because there’s no ‘local’ identity to connect around? That is, just because we live/spend lots of time in the area doesn’t mean we have anything in common? Or is it because even that identity requires something more than categorical knowledge? Perhaps it is a fall-back after initial interaction shows that you’ve not much else in common besides your shared use of space? (Research notes, 1st May, 2009)

In light of my projections regarding community, it is unsurprising that I would expect familiarity from those whom I regularly encountered. However, as the quote above suggests, I attached significant expectations to this familiarity, whilst disregarding the notion that propinquity equals community. In the latter I am merely reflecting the opinions of many community theorists before me (e.g., Webber, 1963; Wellman & Leighton, 1979). However, in the former I am also reaffirming my expectation that an experience of community requires an emotional element that the sharing of space does not guarantee. Furthermore, given that the rest of this memo confirms these interactions were friendly, I suggest that the disappointment that is expressed above draws on emotions embedded within the imaginative projection that links recognition to belonging. Thus, instead of indicating reflexivity, my sociological language may be an indicator of the lack of awareness of the strength of that projection.

Theories of imagination suggest these projections are made visible through our habits and the way we react to their expression within the social imaginary (Hanson, 1986). However, the problem with social interaction with people who count, as an object for imagined community, is that people are also liable to become people. That is, the line between reflexive evaluation of behaviour in relation to a social imaginary, and recognition from a definable social network, is fluid and easily
influenced. As the literature on imagination reminds us, the line between reflexivity and fantasy depends on the extent to which an individual can maintain a critical distance from the object in question (Riceour, 1994), and when this object is social or personal recognition, then it is understandable that the distance may be small.

Thus, imagining sociality in consumption spaces as a shared practice of community can become imagining this sociality, or lack thereof, as acceptance or rejection from specific people or social networks. As the following quote demonstrates, this can lead to a reflexive struggle to both recognise the validity of the emotional need within the imaginative projection as well as maintain a level of critical consciousness regarding its potential to fuel fantasy:

… the underlying concern [is] – balancing the superficial and a/the need for deeper connections – how realistic is it to think that, in my circumstance, it would be possible to partition off one need and be satisfied with the other? Clearly it is not. … Or perhaps now that I can see that who I am may be reinforced by growing social connections, I am wondering which I (self) that will be. (Research notes, 2nd February 2009)

As I later acknowledge, I also recognise that this self can also only be a partial representation of this place.

It seems to me that all I can achieve here is connection with a social network – not a community. That social network may come to represent Northcote for me, as it colours my experience of Northcote – but of course it is not the whole of the place. (Research notes, 14th May 2009)

This reflexive realisation also recognises that the identity this social network circumscribed did not sufficiently describe the place image I had constructed, and sheds light on my earlier difficulties in evaluating my imaginings of community against this they. It is for this reason that objects and shared practices of broader people and spaces discussed in the following section took on a significant role.
Along with the concept of the imagined presence able to be embedded in objects, theories of imagined communities also emphasise the role of shared practices; that is, simultaneous actions that reinforce community membership by establishing links between individual actors. This section explores the role of these shared practices, focusing on the ways they extend my imaginings of Northcote beyond the partial image provided by the social relations discussed above.

As noted earlier, Northcote contains two key public spaces, High Street and Northcote Plaza. Both are consumption precincts that contain a range of consumption spaces that target different segments of the area’s population. High Street’s offering is lifestyle-focused, whilst Northcote Plaza’s offering is mostly functional. It is because of its ordinariness that Northcote Plaza at first appeared an unlikely place in which the shared practices of imagined community may be experienced. Instead, its mundane consumption offering appeared more likely to reduce identification to that of consumer, as non-place (Auge, 1995). However, as noted above, social imaginaries, of which consumer society is an example, are important reference points within the processes of imagining. Furthermore, as I came to recognise, this is not necessarily a placeless identity, and instead is shaped by the physical environment in which it is manifest. The following discussion explores this through a long excerpt from research notes from the 3rd and 4th March 2009. The note began as a record of routine shopping at Northcote Plaza and a small strip shopping precinct in the adjacent suburb of Thornbury, and turned into a reflection on, and illustration of, the process of imagining how shared practices can be emplaced in everyday spaces and activities.

What I do at [Thornbury] is check out other people and categorise them … It’s mainly people shopping by themselves, or mums with kids, and I don’t see that many older people. And I don’t really see that many ‘mainstream’ people either, probably because they are all at work. But it does … reinforce my sense of what the people are like around here, or at least those who can shop during the week, and makes me feel a bit like I am one of them – in the same category
So, my everyday shopping practices reinforce aspects of my place-identification, and confirm my belief that others in my neighbourhood share those place-identity predilections. I then continued:

The Plaza is a place that everyone ends up at some point. Being there is less about identity and more about convenience. Of course what one chooses to do there expresses identity, but I don’t think presence tells much. The fact that I walk through it to go to High Street is based on my residential location, but may be seen as being there a lot (which of course I am). I guess I see the Plaza as mainly instrumental – for me anyway. It’s a habit with no real identity-defining purposes (except that I don’t heap scorn on it like other people do, and rarely buy my fruit and vegetables there).

Thus again, my instrumental consumption communicates aspects of my identity, even if I am reluctant to admit that. Furthermore, although both locations are about convenient everyday shopping, I have created a distinction between them according to their value offering and the ways this categorises people. I then concluded:

I don’t really see the Plaza as a place of sociality – for me. I see lots of other people engaging in interaction there, particularly the old Greek men, but also people running into each other, and I have even seen [neighbour] and [hairdresser] there once. But in reality I don’t expect to see people or have the potential for recognition experiences there, despite the fact it is the most certain place where people will be eventually – and also most likely to mark a person as being from the local area. I just don’t expect it from a shopping mall – with relation to my demographic.

As I then clarify, this distinction is based more on my expectations of social interaction, which as discussed in the previous section operated within specific parameters of who and what counted, rather than on the specific built or business environment in which the shopping experience has framed. Thornbury is about
identification as general categorisation, and I have no expectation of anything else. However I recognise that the Plaza offers the potential for something more, to “mark” a person as being local, yet doubt this could apply to “my demographic”.

The irony of my reflections on these identifications, and my conclusion that they have no real social value to me, is that they were instigated by the recollection of seeing people from the High Street consumption spaces, alluded to above, in the Plaza. This experience was rationalised as not “particularly exciting, and didn’t do anything for the ‘being recognised thing’”; however, it clearly fuelled a process of imagining how such experiences may relate to community. This is not only because it led me to consider the important role these ordinary consumption spaces play in reinforcing general categorisations of identity, in the manner of the social imaginary. But also because it highlighted that the shared practices of imagined community may stem from a reflexive appreciation of the social interaction and collective identification of others. Indeed, at the end of that note I rhetorically asked myself, with a seemingly contradictory sense of hope, “Have I been here long enough that I’m starting to run into people in the supermarket? Maybe I am becoming a local after all?”

This reflection on the differing identity-defining potential of my shopping practices was not the moment in which place-identification became community, which as this paper has described was instead a fragmented process that oscillated between reflexive evaluation and fictional projection. However, it is indicative of a shift in my imagining, from the belief in affirmation through social recognition, to the beginning of the construction of a shared practice as imagined presence. This is significant because it shifts the focus from a self-oriented experience, to one that is observed in another. In doing so, this creates a reflexive distance required to recognise the fascinated imagining of the social as object, and the recognition that the shared practice of community does not need to be embedded in my personal relations. Instead the presence can be experienced through a reflexive appreciation of different groups of people engaging in similar activities, in different places and times, but in ways that match my imaginative projection of public sociality as representative of community.
Imagining the Presence of Community Across Public and Quasi-public Spaces

This paper has drawn on an autoethnography to explore how my experiences in the public and quasi-public spaces of my neighbourhood constructed the objects and shared practices of an imagined community. As this paper has argued, this is a cumulative but fragmented process, in which positive and negative experiences of interaction with people and things are searched for the potential to operate as the objects and shared practices of imagined community. Specifically, this paper has considered the ways I imagined my new neighbourhood was a place-based extension of my self, and then explored the means through which I attempted to imagine that place could offer me an experience of community. I drew on the physical and symbolic elements of the neighbourhood, in particular my experiences within its consumption spaces, to construct a fit between the offerings of the neighbourhood and my desires for place-based identification.

This paper has explored this process through the interplay between my reflexive evaluations and fictional projections as I sought to situate a social experience within the place-identification I had constructed. I have described this as a flawed search for the objects of community within social interaction and networks. This oscillated between the reflexive evaluation of the incongruities between these collectives and the place-identification I sought to affirm, and an emotional attachment to that social recognition nonetheless. This is because, when imagining that social interactions equal community, the line between personal recognition and an experience of community is fluid, such that the lack of the former may be read as failure, rather than be recognised as a partial representation.

Instead, as my discussion of the more ordinary spaces of the neighbourhood indicate, imagining that social interaction equals shared practices is more effective as a marker of community when it is the practice, rather than the recognition, that forms the connection to the community. This imagined sharing of practices is more successful in communicating the imagined presence because it shifts the reference point from being about self, or places, to being about community. In doing so, it is also possible to gain a reflexive distance from the more personal— and thus more prone to fascinated miscalculation – construction of community as experienced
through social interaction with specific social networks. Furthermore, these more ordinary spaces support the emplacement of the collective of the imagined community within a broader space than that constructed through my relations with a social network. And, in doing so, they affirm a place-identity that more closely matches that which I have constructed as an extension of my self.

In conclusion, then, this paper suggests that consumption practices and spaces can support the construction of imagined neighbourhood-based community by providing physical, social, and symbolic resources that one can draw on to construct an image of place as an extension of the self. Yet the inherent instability of these objects, shared practices, and the projections we embed within them, also works to disrupt those imaginings. This instability can force one to question the orientation and motives of those imaginings, and subsequently reflexively reframe them according to different spaces and reference groups in ways that can also work to construct a more anonymous, and conversely more achievable collective identification. In this way, then, imagining community is a negotiation, with people and spaces – but mostly with the different identifications of the self.
Chapter Nine
Conclusion: The Reflexive Fantasy of Imagined Community

The aim of this thesis was to explore the ways the belonging of community may be experienced within the shifting context of an inner city neighbourhood. To do so, the thesis adopted a framework of imagined community, and considered the ways this may be constructed through consumption practices, and the public and quasi-public spaces that frame them. This is because consumption practices and spaces have been shown through research to support both individual and collective identity construction. Furthermore, the consumption-based lifestyles that gentrifying inner city neighbourhoods both support and encourage can also mean that consumption practices may be a key reason that people are moving through public space. That is, consumption practices and spaces can provide a purpose for which – and spatial frame against which – our everyday interactions and connections with people and objects are undertaken within such neighbourhoods.

However, whilst consumption practices and spaces provided the contextual frame for the research, the key the purpose of the investigation was to delve into the subjective identifications and emotional responses that are at the heart of this imagining of belonging. The thesis describes this as occurring through a process of anchoring and exposure. This requires opportunities to personally identify and emotionally invest in people and places, as well as to distance oneself from that investment and reflexively recognise those experiences in the practices of others. This thesis argues that these connections may arise from the interplay between the processes of imagining described here as the critical and fascinated consciousness (Ricoeur, 1994). In this cumulative but fragmented process, positive and negative experiences of interaction and identification with objects and shared practices are drawn upon to construct imagined community. In doing so, this interplay seeks to balance desires for experiences of belonging, with a reflexive recognition of the complexities of constructing them within the throwntogether context of the contemporary city.
In the quotation by Brann (1991) that opened the thesis, it was suggested that imagination can turn space into place through both the projection of human feeling, and a willingness to affected by its presences. This thesis concludes that imagining community similarly relies on both a willingness to project those desires for belonging into space in a search for anchoring, and an openness to be affected by the multitude of projections of people and things that are situated within realms of exposure.

The research problems that guided this autoethnographic exploration of imagining community were defined in chapter two as follows:

*How do an individual’s consumption practices work to construct an imagined presence of neighbourhood-based community?*

To particularly consider the role of the physical and symbolic elements of public and quasi-public space the research also asked:

*How do experiences in the public and quasi-public spaces that frame these practices contribute to the construction of this imagined presence?*

These research questions arose through the exploration of relevant theories on imagination, community, place and consumption spaces. In particular the thesis has drawn on theories of community and the ways it may be imagined, as well as discussions of space, place and collective identifications within our contemporary networked societies. These theories were drawn on to develop a framework through which to consider the manner in which people and objects, as well as processes of consumption and imagination, may work to shape the imagining of community. In developing this framework, I proposed that moments of negotiations of the multiplicity of the contemporary urban environment might also support the imagining of community. That is, that the experiences generated through our negotiations – of the coming together of the trajectories of people and things – become the basis of an imagined presence that is experienced here and now, but may also be projected across space and time. These projections, or memory traces as per Urry (2000), can construct links between disparate experiences and people in ways that begin to construct an imagined community. It is the manner in which this presence of imagined community was constructed through everyday lived experiences that was the focus of the research.
As outlined in chapter two, the theories of Anderson and Urry suggest that objects and shared practices play an important role in affirming that imagined presence. This perspective is supported by research on consumer behaviour, which highlights the ways consumption practices and the spaces that frame them can facilitate experiences in which identity-defining meaning can be generated and shared. It is for this reason that the thesis focused on public and quasi-public spaces and our experiences within them. These are the spaces in which much of our lived experience of neighbourhood is emplaced, and they thus present as valuable resources for our imaginative processes. As the thesis has argued, they are also spaces that can support the construction and emplacement of meaning in ways that can be both individually and collectively identity-defining. As outlined in chapter two, this may be through anchoring established collectives, or exposing diverse individuals to each other in ways that can habituate difference or create opportunities for connection through disruption (Aubert-Gamet & Cova, 1999). The manner in which these anchoring and exposure realms supported my imagining of community was a key focus of chapters five, six, and seven.

This theoretical approach to issues of community within a gentrifying inner city context was adopted as a means through which to consider issues of community in the shifting context of a gentrifying neighbourhood. Whilst the demographic details presented in chapter three clearly show that Northcote is gentrifying, as that chapter also sought to demonstrate, it does not necessarily follow that this results in predictable outcomes in relation to a place-identity. This is not only because the area’s broader role as an activity centre means that its public and quasi-public spaces serve a population that is more socio-economically diverse than of the suburb, but also because, as outlined within the review of literature, the open, fluid and networked nature of contemporary urban environments makes generalised assumptions regarding coherent place identities problematic.

Instead, in chapter three I describe Northcote as an area where identity is both shifting, and yet also self-referential, drawing on aspects of its history to anchor its present, and thus projecting those historical elements into its future. This conclusion is based on an overview of the area’s historical development and current circumstances, which demonstrates Northcote’s long history of demographic and
housing investment-led change. This is also supported by government and media
descriptions of the area, which fail to articulate clear, shared values or identities, and
instead draw on stereotypes or generalities to describe different fragments of the
area’s demographics and lifestyle offerings. This conclusion also supports my
application of theories of Urry, Massey and Amin, to adopt a perspective of
Northcote as a space where the trajectories of a multitude of people and things,
moving at different speeds of time, come together within a small geographic area to
construct certain kinds of situated multiplicity. Drawing on the framework of
imagined community, this thesis sought to explore the ways that experiences of
belonging may be constructed within such a context utilising my own experience of
seeking belonging within Northcote.

To do so the thesis adopted an autoethnographic methodology, as was outlined in
chapter four. This is a methodology that encourages a reflexive exploration of
subjective elements, and was therefore seen as the most appropriate manner through
which to explore the questions of this thesis. Indeed, as someone who is broadly
identifiable as middle class – yet often lives on meagre incomes, who wants to live
in inner city areas and is partial to having a decent bar and cafe in walking distance,
and yet also cares about experiencing community – my research concerns were
closely related to my sense of self and my understandings and expectations of the
types of places I want to live in. In that respect, my desires for place-based
identification and belonging, and recent relocation, presented a valuable opportunity
to explore the process of imagining community. It is recognised that the focus on the
researcher as respondent introduces limitations, particularly if the research is
evaluated according to positivist norms of objectivity and validity. However, this
thesis has argued that the risk is justified. This is because autoethnography enables
the exploration of subjectivities at the heart of imagining community in ways that
would be problematic for other research methodologies, and thus, I argue, was the
methodology best suited to investigate the questions of this thesis.

In particular, the focus on one respondent has allowed for greater attention to be paid
to the manner in which meaning attributed to experiences of personal and collective
identification accumulates over time and across spaces. In doing so, this thesis has
addressed a recent call for a greater visibility of the self within urban research, and in
particular for urban scholars to reflexively explore the ways their personal histories intersect with gentrification, and the manner in which this shapes their research perspectives (Schlichtman & Patch, 2011). The in-depth longitudinal approach has also allowed an examination of longer-term meaningfulness of public and quasi-public space encounters. In doing so, the thesis aimed to move beyond the temporal assumptions that Valentine and Sadgrove (2012) argue have limited research on public encounter. In the case of this research, this allowed for greater consideration of the ways these encounters are influenced by, or may themselves become, memory traces with the power to project imagined community.

Drawing on the methodological guidelines for autoethnography described by Ellis (2004), data collection focused on systematically recording my consumption practices and experiences within the public and quasi-public spaces of Northcote, Melbourne. Specifically the research has focused on my actions and interactions within the area’s two main consumption precincts, High Street and Northcote Plaza. As was described throughout the chapters of the thesis, these two spaces played distinct but equally important roles in my experience of imagining community within my neighbourhood. The variety of consumption offerings within these spaces facilitated diverse opportunities for personal and collective identification. Furthermore, because these spaces also physically and symbolically communicated different aspects of the neighbourhood’s identities and cultures, they also offered me a range of opportunities to emplace my imagining of community.

The following sections bring the discussions of these spaces from chapters five, six, seven, and eight together according their to relation to personal or collective identification experiences. It is these processes that the thesis has argued form the basis of the construction of an imagined community through consumption-based experiences and actions. This is because these processes of identification can both work to anchor an individual into a specific space, as well as provide opportunities through realms of exposure to construct the links to diverse others that become the basis of an imagined presence of a broader neighbourhood they. The final section of the conclusion returns to the core issue of imagining, draws these different identifications together, and considers their relation to the processes of critical and fascinated consciousness (Ricoeur, 1994). Finally, in line with the aim of
autoethnography to inspire reflection in others, the thesis concludes with a series of questions aimed to inspire the reader to consider their own relation to neighbourhood-based community.

Anchoring and Personal Identification in Public and Quasi-public Spaces

This thesis proposes that imagining community involves both personal and collective identification. Of these two processes, personally identifying and establishing a sense of who I was within this place, to me, was both fundamental and problematic. I have described this in the chapters of the thesis as an authenticating act, as anchoring, and as an identification of place as an extension of the self. However, in each case I am referring to the process of determining a sense of self in relation to the physical, social, and symbolic resources of my new neighbourhood. It is this determination that the thesis argues is key to the imagining of community, because it is this place-based identification of the individual that becomes the basis of the identity of the imagined community.

As is discussed across the thesis, consumption spaces are important sites of both personal and place-based identity definition. This is because our actions within and preferences for specific types of consumption spaces can reflect a desired identity. Thus, in our choices of specific consumption spaces within a neighbourhood we are constructing our lived experience of that place as an expression of a perceived or desired personal identity, as was outlined in chapter eight. That is, our consumption practices and the patterns of moving through and being in space that they support work to construct the contours of the imagined place in which the community can then be situated.

However, as discussed in detail in chapter six, whilst the process of personal identification within consumption spaces draw on physical and symbolic elements, it also includes, and is strengthened by, social interaction. This is because our assessments of our sense of self are made in comparison to some kind of other, whether that is broader society, a definable social network, or primary relations. Thus, as I established specific consumption spaces within my neighbourhood that expressed my sense of self, I also sought to have that self validated by others,
through fleeting interaction and personal recognition. In Harry’s in particular, I experienced both the benefits and complications of that process, as I sought the balance a personal desire for recognition as a “person worth knowing”, with a theoretical understanding that public space interaction is broadly secondary.

Thus, whilst the owners of Harry’s and some of the customers are now my friends, as chapter six outlines, this was not as simple as turning up and trying not to be obnoxious that Oldenburg (1999) imagines it to be. In this thesis I suggest that this was because the social realms within such spaces may shift, from those oriented towards anchored social networks to those that are so open that the third place potential can be undermined. Determining where one personally sits within these shifting realms is, as described in chapters five, six, and eight, a problematic process that may be experienced as negative, and draw on imaginative projections or fantasies that skew one’s perspective of those experiences. At the same time however, the emotional and imaginative energy that was invested in this process also served to strengthen the sense of I within this place that this kind of anchoring supports.

Thus whilst anchoring realms can provide cultural groups or social networks a public space in which to gather and reinforce their collective identification, the thesis argues that they also play an important role in anchoring the individual within a specific identity, one which draws on the physical, social and symbolic resources of that space, but may not necessarily construct strong connections to the collectives. Furthermore, I argue that this personal identification can be a powerful resource in the construction of an imagined community, as it can be utilised in ways that project or highlight shared practices, and thus offer exposure to others. That is, this emotionally anchored personal identification can offer a secure position that forms the basis of reflexive recognition of the manner in which that identity could be connected to the broader they of the neighbourhood, through realms of exposure.
Exposure and Collective Identification across Public and Quasi-public Precincts

As the thesis has also demonstrated, the process of developing a sense of self within Northcote through personal identification in anchoring realms in High Street was balanced by the ordinary experiences offered by the more open spaces of the neighbourhood, what I have called exposure realms. This is Aubert-Gamet and Cova’s (1999) terminology, but applies to the kind of open and lightly regulated spaces that Amin (2008) argues offer a kind of situated multiplicity that can support tacit collective experiences. Both High Street as a precinct and Northcote Plaza operated in this manner. However, it was Northcote Plaza that was most effective in this role, in part, I argue, because of the juxtaposition between its unintended role as a space of sociality, and its commercial function as a relatively banal shopping centre. This thesis argues that these realms of exposure are also significant in the process of imagining community because they enable the construction of a broader image of what the community as anonymous they entails. In doing so they can also construct a more open space in which to situate that imagined identity. This process was explored in different ways across chapters five, seven, and eight.

In chapters five and eight I discussed the manner in which these broader exposure realms operated as space in which to gain a reflexive distance from the personal identification experiences (and disappointments) of specific consumption spaces on High Street. These exposure realms were able to do that because their diverse consumption offering shifted the target market, and thus the collective with which one interacts and shares space, from a narrow demographic generally in line with my cultural group, to a broader and more anonymous they. In chapter five I discuss this in relation to authoritative performances, where observed shared practices are drawn upon to authenticate the place identity I had constructed. In chapter eight I more explicitly consider the manner in which the broad appeal of the Plaza both works to shift to nature of the comparative they, but also works to embed it within the place that it is manifest. As that chapter described, when I recognised the potential for shared practices in the anchoring and greeting behaviours of others, I also situated those behaviours within the context in which they were witnessed. Furthermore, in
doing so, I did not attribute these shared practices to a broader society, or a global
cultural group of people who anchor within consumption spaces, but to the image of
the place I have developed through my personal identification, such that these shared
practices become the continuation of a culture of gathering within that place.

These practices are emplaced in this way in part because of the manner in which I
have connected the public and quasi-public spaces of my neighbourhood into a
coherent sense of place by my movements through them. This process of
constructing a realm of exposure of the imagined community through my
movements through these spaces is described in chapter seven. The aim of that
chapter was to demonstrate the manner in which I created an image of place that was
coloured with my experiences with its built form, my knowledge of its physical and
social history, and my everyday negotiations of the ways these elements came
together, as I travelled through its spaces.

That chapter also expanded the focus on the social elements of chapters five and six,
to more closely consider the role of the physical and symbolic as trajectories that
shape memory traces and project the imagined presence. Adopting such a
perspective was particularly relevant to understanding the influence of the broader
High Street precinct, which exemplified the manner in which the mobilities of
people and objects can fold layers of history into everyday experiences. Thus whilst
High Street was often devoid of the kind of sociality that made the Plaza an
important exposure realm, it nonetheless communicated elements of the
neighbourhood’s identity, and accordingly affirmed my own construction of place
within that. The construction of who I was personally within specific anchoring
places supported the ability to begin to recognise the shared practices of community.
Similarly, the construction of an image of my neighbourhood through my
movements in and through it, created a landscape in which I was able to emplace
those shared practices and thus imagine that community as of that place.

The research therefore reinforces the work of researchers such as Amin and Watson
on the potential of open and lightly regulated public spaces to operate in ways I have
termed exposure realms. From a neighbourhood perspective it also reinforces the
importance of a diversity of public and quasi-public spaces that different cultural
groups are able to individually identify with, and highlights that we cannot overlook
the importance of spaces that may be viewed by some as mundane or commodified, yet offer anchoring potential for others. In particular it supports claims regarding the important role the physical and symbolic play in this exposure, by highlighting the ways these contribute to the construction of the imagined presence.

The Reflexive Fantasy of Imagined Community

This thesis has drawn on an autoethnography of my experiences of moving to, and striving to connect with, a neighbourhood-based community as a means of exploring the ways that experiences within public and quasi-public spaces can support community within the gentrifying inner city. As the thesis has described, this is a cumulative yet fragmented process that oscillates through cycles of personal and collective identifications within anchoring and exposure realms that were easily disrupted by the fluidity of the contexts in which they were constructed. Drawing on theories of the imagination, I have argued that this construction of community through anchoring and exposure relies on an interplay between what Ricoeur (1994) terms the critical and fascinated consciousness. As outlined within the literature review, these are both elements of the productive imagination and are implicated in the construction of fictions, as well as the ability to gain the reflexive distance to recognise their constructed nature. Both have also been associated with community: as a fascinated driver of the desire for an emotional connection, and the critical ability to use the shared practices and values of community to evaluate ones sense of self (Bauman, 2001; Taylor, 2004).

In this research I explored these processes of the imagination from the perspective of the individual and in relation to neighbourhood-based community. This exploration highlighted the extent to which the critical and fascinated consciousness work together in the construction of an experience of community that has both emotional presence, and yet is able to be recognised as imagined. As was demonstrated most clearly in relation to my attempts at personal identification, the fascinated consciousness imbues experiences with hope and desire. This emotional investment is described by Bauman (2001) as one which fuels that insecurity, and the manner in which my own reflexive imagining was able to turn that hope into disappointment
and shame as it critically reflected on the reality of those fascinated projections certainly supports that perspective. At the same time, however, the thesis has argued that the emotional investment in this identification, both positive and negative, only serves to reinforce the significance of the anchoring it seeks to achieve. As Brann (1991) notes in her description of the processes of the imagination quoted in chapter two (see page 22), this emotional investment can also be said to beautify the visions of the imagination, and project them in a transparency that enables the imagination to overlook disparities in its search for connections.

However rather than attribute this search for connection as solely a product of the fascinated or deluded imagination, I have argued that the reflexive imagination willingly supports this process. As noted within the review of literature, imagined communities play an important role in the reflexive evaluation of identity (Hanson, 1986; Taylor, 2004). The thesis demonstrates the extent to which the reflexive imagination searches the practices of others for affirmation of those projections, effectively seeking to prove the reality of the fantasy of the imagined community. This is mostly clearly demonstrated in the connections drawn between my anchoring practices and those observed in others, where it is not only differences in demographics and locations that are overlooked in the construction of a shared practice, but also my own insecurities regarding the success of my personal identifications. It is for this reason that I argued that the process of imagining community is also a process of negotiating the different identities of the self.

Finally the research has sought to demonstrate that when considered in reference to neighbourhood-based community, it is not only the social imaginary that is used as a reflexive tool in this process, but also the presences projected by physical and symbolic elements. As discussed within chapter eight, the imagining of community can be said to begin with the construction of a place within the being of the imaginer. This may draw on representations of history that are used to situate and contextualise practices in the present, as well as disruptions in the present that further highlight the ways habitual practices construct the imagined community. As per Urry (2000), this thesis argues the potential of the physical and symbolic to project the imagined presence is significant for its ability to normalise change by presenting it as occurring in different speeds of time. This is because the underlying

---

Chapter Nine: Conclusion
element of constructing imagined community within the contemporary urban context is that it is fundamentally unstable, and thus ever evolving.

However the focus on individual experience that this thesis adopted implies that proposing general recommendations regarding the application of these conclusions is problematic. Instead, in line with the aim of autoethnography to encourage research that readers can use as a tool to reflect on their own experiences and practices, I conclude this thesis with a series of questions and invite the reader to reflect on them in relation to their own experiences of public and quasi-public space, neighbourhood, and community.

- How do you view your neighbourhood in relation to your sense of self? What physical, social, and symbolic elements does this draw on? What elements do you ignore?
- How could you use your actions in public and quasi-public spaces to support the anchoring of your identity and exposure to others within your neighbourhood? What does it mean to you when this happens?
- If you could imagine yourself a community, what would it look like? How could you begin to make that image a reality?
References


200
Australian Bureau of Statistics Retrieved from

Australian Bureau of Statistics Retrieved from

Australian Bureau of Statistics Retrieved from


concept of place in contemporary markets (pp. 25-54). Chicago: NTC Business Books.


In A. Caru & B. Cova (Eds.), *Consuming experience* (pp. 17-33). London: Routledge.


References


