'The Barcelona for darts'

Cultural justice and everyday practice

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Abstract

This thesis starts with a simple question: what does thriving cultural practice look like in Stoke-on-Trent? Delving into two case studies, based on 12 months of ethnographic fieldwork, I explore questions of cultural value and meaning between a darts league and a line dancing club – and in the delving other value arguments emerge. The title of this thesis is borrowed from Phil Taylor – the 16-times darts world champion and Stoke's best-known sporting success story. Rather than thinking of Stoke as 'left behind' (in the jargon), these two case studies challenge the hollowness of that idea. Stoke can claim the best darts leagues in the world, enough to play every night of the week and attracting international talent, and line dance classes led by a famous choreographer. At the right pub on the right night, Stoke-on-Trent is Barcelona-like – and in this thesis I will unpack this comparison, and what it means and does.

My analysis centres around two different cultural justice framings: justice for practices overlooked as 'low', and justice for cultural objects and activities themselves. Here I bring the case studies into dialogue with these demands, and expand into questions of culture, class, place, taste, and politics in solidarity. While the darts and dancing were different, they shared some things: often needing the same infrastructure; it being difficult to wrestle analytically a sense of the activity beyond the way the activity was done; and that they could each be usefully described as 'everyday' – though here everyday is used as a way to hold together different contradictions, like grieving at a working men's club or bumping into a famous darts player in a pub.

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1 Introduction

What's so good about culture? And why isn't it found in Stoke?

Figure 1: *Everyday darts. Photo courtesy of Dan Lyttleton*

This thesis explores two examples of everyday cultural practices in Stoke-on-Trent through two cultural justice arguments. These two justice arguments, that stress where academics and commentators should focus their attention – what to do justice *to* – are distinctly opposed. One claims that justice needs to be done to activities and groups deemed outside the remit of cultural critics, so expanding the remit of cultural criticism, and the other wants justice for objects and activities that yield special kinds of cultural value, thus restating a boundary for cultural criticism. In their opposition, these arguments attempt to define a direction for cultural studies by claiming a what and a why: what to study, and why study it. In this thesis I will use these arguments as starters for wider discussions of cultural value and meaning.

The two case studies are purposefully chosen. The first, a major inspiration for this thesis, is the darts scene in Stoke-on-Trent. Stoke has a famously thriving darting culture that nurtures professional talent and boasts many local leagues – in Stoke one can play darts in a different league every night of the week. The second case study is a long-running line dancing club, led by an internationally recognised teacher and choreographer. What links these two case studies is their contextual success, and if this thesis has a commitment, it is this: Stoke is not uncultured. Phil Taylor, who it is hard to find a non-darts comparison for – think Tiger Woods or Serena Williams, but even more dominant – described Stoke-on-Trent as 'the Barcelona for darts'. Stoke is not a city with a reputation for cultural excellence, but seen differently it might be considered Barcelona-like – a standard-bearer for European cultural capital. This comparison, and how I have chosen to read it, gets a much longer introduction later in this thesis, and reflects a want to explore a richer sense of place than Stoke is often afforded.

I bring these justice arguments and case studies together to question the value of everyday cultural practices, and the value of different forms of evaluation. My broad research question is:

How might we best understand and value forms of everyday cultural practices?

With this broad question, I bring complimentary interests in place and cultural taste, similar concerns around class and taste, the everydayness of everyday practice, the relationship between activity and meaning, and a question of politics – do forms of cultural practice hold together something meaningfully political, and/or is there a politics in valuing forms of cultural participation? I will elaborate on these themes shortly.

It is important to state early that despite my named interest in 'everyday cultural practices', darts is not neatly a form of cultural practice – at least not traditionally. Rather than begin with a given idea of what is and what isn't cultural practice, I keep open the sense that darts and line dancing might be considered cultural practice, and use the two cultural justice arguments to explore this question – where even at the line dancing club, and dance being more obviously an example of cultural practice, the cultural element is complex.

Another major inspiration for this thesis is David Bell and Mark Jayne's book *Small Cities* (2006). In it,

they challenge academics to think differently about small cities like Stoke-on-Trent – and with this challenge, to think differently about cities more generally. Bell and Jayne make a broad critique of urban studies, describing a pattern in which only big cities are called upon to account for city-ness. This leaves a gap in workable concepts when attention might turn to smaller cities like Stoke – and helpfully, Stoke is also their inspiration. The workable concepts urban studies offers can only make somewhere like Stoke seem less than Manchester or Birmingham – these Stoke's larger neighbours. But Stoke is surely filled with its own city-ness, and we can do better than effectively explain Stoke as *less London* – because it is seemingly less throwntogether, less dense, less networked. These all may be true, but what is Stoke more of? While planning this research, Bell and Jayne's argument seemed to challenge an emerging idea of 'left behind' places – the label that named and explained, for some media commentators, the Brexit vote in post-industrial cities. The quickness and flatness of this argument illustrated exactly Bell and Jayne's point: that we need a better language for describing small cities, so such a hasty reading could be given pause for thought by a wealth of other ideas – and at least more ambivalent labels. Bell and Jayne ask *what does smallness mean?*, if bigness is in fact the dominant urban idea. And this, I wondered, might be usefully explored through a booming yet distinctly local darts scene – 'the Barcelona for darts', big but small.

This research is not, however, *about* Stoke-on-Trent – though maybe there was a time when I thought it was. Instead, it is about the value of everyday cultural practices that are thriving in Stoke. The focus on Stoke comes from the Centre for Understanding Sustainable Prosperity (CUSP) – to which this research is attached. My thesis contributes to the Arts and Culture strand, and Stoke is one of three places in the UK where CUSP has chosen to focus. However, and without wishing to seemingly contradict myself, Stoke is still more than a setting for broader questions, and a focus on thriving practices reflects a want to engage with a sense of place. The second chapter of this thesis gives this tension some context.

Why 'everyday' in everyday cultural practice? This research is built on a contradiction between wanting to think through more everyday forms of cultural activity, but not always, and certainly not immediately, finding 'everyday' a useful description. Addressing cultural policy concerns, Abi Gilmore (2013) introduces an idea of 'quiet cultural participation' as opposed to the registered and routinely measured 'predominant epistemologies of arts participation' (ibid: 94) – here echoing a commitment to think that no place is uncultured. Gilmore rejects the idea of a cultural 'cold spot', at least the ways that such conclusions are arrived at, and calls for more locally rooted efforts to understand cultural practice through place – just because people don't go to art galleries, does that make them

uncultured, or not culturally engaged? This argument finds full voice in one of the anchoring justice arguments I explore in this thesis. This linking of quiet or 'everyday' activities with things not yet explored, where 'everyday' is a call to think beyond given understandings, is consistent with other areas of scholarship beyond cultural value debates – collecting a range of approaches, Ben Highmore (2002b) describes that: "everyday life invites a kind of theorising that throws our most cherished *theoretical* values and practices into crisis" (ibid: 3, emphasis in original). So everyday is an invitation to think beyond, and to attend with curiosity to the seemingly less spectacular.

However, 'everyday' still has a strange fit in my research. With a sociological interest, Les Back writes seductively that: "everyday life helps the seasons of society to come into view […] it makes us take the mundane seriously and ask what is at stake in our daily encounters with neighbours or the people we brush past at the bus stop" (2015: 820-821). While wanting to seek out cultural activities that might be deemed fringe, and in a city with a relatively fringe status, I have not researched bus stops – far from it. But despite this, 'everyday' has still proved a useful analytic – because the activities I will describe were generally attended by enthusiasts who would participate almost every day, or at least every week, and some of their remarkable qualities had a particular and prized mundane quality. In this thesis I will offer some suggestions as to how 'everyday' might hold together meaningful contradictions that figure in value arguments.

Through a close engagement with the two cultural justice arguments, and putting them to work on two case studies, I demonstrate the troubles in building value arguments whilst also, I hope, showing the worth of trying. Drawing on literature from cultural studies, human geography, sociology, cultural policy, and cultural theory, the arguments in this thesis contribute to ongoing debates around cultural value and meaning, culture and place, the significance of cultural taste, the importance of everyday practices, and socialist-minded research – by situating cultural value debates in different settings, testing ideas of taste beyond a taste hierarchy, thinking carefully about the role of activity in cultural experience, exploring the everydayness of everyday practices, and engaging with a question of politics. The majority of this work is done in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 – by far the largest chapters in this thesis, where I bring my theoretical and empirical concerns together.

With such an open question, the main themes of this research have emerged through fieldwork. With this in mind, I will continue this introduction by discussing why I have opted to anchor my writing around two justice arguments, before clarifying the main themes of this research, and finally outlining the structure of this thesis.

1.1 Why cultural justice?

Questions of value and justice are not separate, but justice stresses a way of approaching what is considered valuable – even if opaque, notions of justice reflect a broader value frame. So social justice mobilises an ethic of collective flourishing, intergenerational justice demands the same but over time, and a film like *Billy Elliot* presents a just ending because the talented kid finds success – and meritocracy is a particularly heady justice narrative. In structuring this research, two foundational questions of justice have helped shape an already present interest in value – by putting cultural value in context.

Each of the central justice arguments in this thesis is reacting to something, and in many ways they are reacting to each other. They are by no means the only ways of approaching questions of cultural value and meaning, but reflect two broad schools of thought – and by engaging with both, I hope to give my overall arguments some breadth. The first justice argument taken up is the expansive ideal of 'everyday participation' (Miles and Gibson 2016; 2017). Building on arguments like Gilmore's (2013), and invoking Pierre Bourdieu and Raymond Williams on the way, everyday participation seeks to make a break from the purportedly narrow tracks of cultural criticism. The term emerges from the Understanding Everyday Participation research project[1], and establishes a populist alternative to any strict or canonical idea of cultural practice. Everyday participation then champions activities that exist outside a mainstream narrative of arts and culture – born of a critique that this mainstream reflects a classed, gendered and racialised history too often reproducing reified bourgeois pleasures. The cumulative effect of this history is the concentration of attention and funding in a narrow set of practices enjoyed by too narrow a section of society. The aim of everyday participation is to challenge this narrowness by opening up questions of cultural value to a broader range of practices, and broader ideas of what value means. Phil Taylor is a natural ally here.

With a very different goal in mind, in *Creative Justice* (2017) Mark Banks argues against the kind of openness that everyday participation advocates. While mindful of the value of their overall critique, Banks challenges a complete opening up of would-be cultural objects and practice, and attempts to establish some fundamental grounds under which to advocate for the value of art and culture – as special kinds of experience. While it is Banks who I use to demonstrate this perspective, this is not dissimilar to the position David Hesmondhalgh advocates in *Why Music Matters* (2013) – and I also draw regularly on *Why Music Matters* in this thesis. Is it important to establish some differences

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[1] An AHRC-funded project running from 2012-2017. For more information, see: everydayparticipation.org

between darts and dancing? Banks thinks so, and so this is my route into the line dancing case study.

So putting both these arguments into their broader value frames, and bridging to my case studies: everyday participation would celebrate the value of darts since it has escaped the attention of arts and cultural consideration, and Banks would select line dancing for particular attention given its special value as a cultural act. These are the starting points of my two case studies chapters – and then thinking through the edges and implications of these positions by way of my fieldwork. These justice arguments are helpful in their efforts to make value valuable – that is, to make the value a person or group, or indeed a researcher might identify more significant than a particular preference. They also bring with them their own definitions and understandings of culture, and I will explore these at length – because culture, as is often said, is complicated.

This is why I have adopted this framing – to discuss cultural value with an angle – and is also why I won't be separating out a literature review from my empirical discussion. Thinking about darts and dancing, and thinking about a means of addressing the question of value and meaning, have not felt like separate tasks. Rather than thinking these justice arguments as finished, and being finished then something to measure a case study against, instead I will use them as a ways of approaching darts and dancing – a ways that generates certain questions, with the case studies then posing back their own. So the arguments and examples are in dialogue, and through this dialogue I make links to various other literatures and concerns.

1.2 Thesis themes

Having started out with a wish to offer a richer account of place, and an interest in a contradiction of cultural excellence – *the Barcelona for darts* – this has evolved into a thesis that addresses several connected themes. With the starting points just described, I branch out into other areas that relate to questions of cultural justice, value and meaning. Here I will begin to introduce them.

Across both case studies I take up the question of cultural taste, and both the darts and dancing excite different questions of taste. Stoke's darts scene presents an interesting question of preference and place – what does it mean that an area has such a taste for something? There is an obvious symmetry between Stoke as a working class city and darts as a practice with working class cultural capital, but this tells only part of the story. Rather than see taste as simply confirmation – *I like this thing therefore I do it*, *we of a type do a thing of a type* – at different points in this thesis I suggest the

usefulness in thinking about taste more expansively. Rather than just confirming a preference, how are we changed by the things we do? How do those things change with us? Essentially, here, I am describing taste in terms of transformation more than confirmation – to play darts or to line dance is to be changed by that thing in some way. And here a value argument can manifest.

'The Barcelona for darts' quote helps start a discussion of taste and place, and the significance of a taste hierarchy, but this ultimately broadens into a discussion of taste and experience – where *Barcelona* says something about hierarchy, but also heightened experience and pleasure. Lynda's line dance classes shift the focus of taste as something that changes – this prompted by the ways line dancers described the classes ageing with them. Here I hope to contribute usefully to understandings of taste and cultural practice, and while championing an approach that takes working class and other more marginal practices seriously, take them seriously enough to think them through carefully, and so give some dignity to their devotees – dignity is given here, for me, in assuming some sophistication in the reasons why dartists and dancers chose to dart and dance.

Another central theme in this thesis is the question of culture and cultural practice – that is, what is the culture of the 'cultural thing'? Such a question requires thinking about culture simultaneously in two ways: as the acts or objects themselves, and more broadly as meanings and histories and those things that shape how we act and how we relate – and most significantly, the ways these interact. This is all borrowed from Raymond Williams, whose ideas and ideals shape this research. I will ask: what do these everyday cultural practices hold together? From where do they draw meaning, and what meanings do they make? And here enters a political question – of supporting things that people draw special kinds of meaning from, and/or celebrating things that seem to manifest something politically significant. While these questions run through the darts discussion to come, they find full voice towards the end of my effort to understand Lynda's line dance classes, and I hope usefully contribute towards efforts to reanimate the value of cultural practice outside of establishment settings and narratives.

These, as well as the central question of cultural justice, puzzling over everydayness, and what city smallness might mean, are threads that run through this thesis. But being so driven by the case studies, other ideas are more directly tied to the fieldwork itself. Stoke's darts scene prompts questions of infrastructure and activity, and the value of something being so collectively valued. And for the line dancing discussion, I draw on literature that helps understand the always-uncertain character of dance, and explore a question of ageing and cultural meaning. These of course are much

more carefully introduced, and put into conversation with the fieldwork later in this thesis, but while these themes vary, they come back to some central concerns: what might we say is the value and meaning of these activities, and where should cultural justice be done.

Finally, at different points I link these interests to policy. The argument for everyday participation is explicitly a policy argument: more money and consideration for a more diverse set of practices. And Banks' *Creative Justice* has policy implications too: more money and consideration for cultural products and practices. As well as these, I consider the movement for cultural democracy (Wilson, Gross and Bull, 2017), and offer my own suggestion to defend the conditions under which cultural practices are given space and time to evolve and find new meaning – drawing on Williams ([1958] 1989): "the difficult full space, the original full time" (ibid: 16). While I would not describe this thesis as cultural policy research, I do still attempt to engage with policy questions, and seek to contribute through exploring questions of value and meaning through the case studies – and in this engagement, to think about what better understanding and support might look like.

1.3 Thesis structure

Chapter 2 of this thesis gives Stoke its proper introduction, and establishes the particular climate in which my interests developed. As already alluded to, Stoke found itself at the centre of a cultural-political discourse around Brexit that went far beyond the city's six towns, yet was pushed upon the six towns, and it is worth explaining in more depth – not because this research is a direct response to this, but did nevertheless shape my thinking. I lay out what has been written about Stoke in academic literatures, and establish where CUSP's interests sit. As has already been mentioned, I am motived by Bell and Jayne's (2006) call for small cities thinking, and this rounds out my Stoke scene setting,

Chapter 3 clarifies my methodological approach, which I would like to pitch as 'ethnographic thinking' more than ethnography, borrowing from Paul Atkinson (2017). As well as establishing the case studies, and setting out the kinds of data I will be presenting, space is given for reflections on the ways the research changed over time. I underestimated many things before beginning fieldwork, and was lucky to find such rich settings and such friendly participants. While this introduction has presented a structure for thinking about cultural justice and for discussing the case studies, this was only arrived at after time spent darting and dancing. I will argue this can be fairly described as 'ethnographic thinking', and that there is value in reading and doing together, but this search for structure is discussed here – most importantly because it helps explain the rest of the thesis.

Chapters 4 and 5 are based around the two case studies and, as mentioned earlier, integrate literature with empirical findings – each forming two substantial analytical discussions. Both chapters begin with fieldnotes describing scenes that help introduce the case studies and frame the discussions to come. In Chapter 4 I consider the darts case study and the call for everyday participation together, giving a longer introduction to this justice argument, and establishing from where it draws influence. I read around its main objectives, and pose questions I then explore through Stoke's darts scene. As well as drawing on interviews with darts players, I spend time trying to capture the Barcelona-like quality of a night of darts in Stoke – using Highmore's *Cultural Feelings* (2017) here as a frame. I then introduce other value frames that dovetail from this discussion – as I suggest, wanting to describe the value of something like darts is not new, but what is new is the idea that cultural policy should mobilise around it. The main objectives here are to interrogate the demand for disposing of given understandings of arts and culture through my own example, and then develop my own value arguments in response. Cultural taste is also a central concern in this chapter, and I move that conversation along from where everyday participation starts off. As well as this, I introduce my own sense of the contradictions in labels like everyday and mundane, that figure helpfully in the following chapter. Towards the end, I offer a more emphatic conclusion than the labelling of everyday participation seems able to deliver – drawing on Andrew Sayer (2011) to suggest darts in Stoke is a powerful example of individual and collective 'commitments' flourishing.

Mirroring Chapter 4, in Chapter 5 I bring Lynda's line dancing classes in step with Banks' *Creative Justice* (2017) argument. Here Banks provides a helpful structure for introducing the classes, but in that structure gaps start to appear. The chapter pivots on what I call 'the unpredictabilties' of the line dance classes, and chief among them the so-called 'variations' – this is the label one interviewee chose for when someone made a mistake while dancing (but of course wasn't considered a mistake). With this wrong-rightness, I draw on literature that helps understand dance as a particular kind of cultural activity, before working to frame the dancing 'variations' as convivial gestures. The chapter then shifts to the dancers' experiences of ageing and grief, and why it is that Lynda's classes evolved in the way they did. From this, several interesting but difficult questions emerge, and I develop an argument for the solidaristic meanings of line dancing – in people and place and practice. Rather than distinct chapters with their own questions, here I pick up on discussions that begin in Chapter 4, and cultural taste as well as other ideas are taken up afresh. I ultimately conclude with more unwavering celebration than the previous chapter, though not quite on beat with Banks.

Given the evolving arguments of the previous chapters, in Chapter 6 I collect together four central points. Two are key takeaways from the proceeding chapters, and two are areas for further research. In this chapter I offer my own cultural justice argument, that in a way blends the two that have anchored the thesis to this point. This chapter does some of the work of the conclusion that follows in Chapter 7, where I summarise the thesis and its contributions, but I have kept it apart as almost a pre-conclusion given the nature of the chapters that proceed that – that are ranging, and so are helped by some grounding. In Chapter 7 I return to my central interests in the value and meaning of everyday cultural practices, and how I have addressed those interest in this thesis.

2 Introducing Stoke-on-Trent

"I need to begin with the blindingly obvious to anyone who lives here: the word 'Stoke' does not have a simple, or single, reference point." (Parker, 2000: 256)

"Stoke is 1 city, 6 towns, and 83 villages!" (Daniel Flynn, from interview)

In this chapter I am going to introduce Stoke, and show how Stoke figures in my research. I try to take up the questions that Bell and Jayne (2006; 2009) suggest, chiefly: "might it be possible to reconceive staying small as something other than stagnation or lack of ambition?" (2006: 247). Bell and Jayne are interested in smaller cities like Stoke, that in their smallness don't inspire much interest or understanding. If city means big, then somewhere like Stoke can only seem less of a city, but of course this is unhelpful – and an urban rethink is needed. Before I get to this though, it is worth exploring and explaining when this research was first thought through – and this chapter will open with some commentary on Stoke's unusual year in 2017, as it was impossible to ignore when planning my research. Stoke has at times made a national splash for its £1 houses, the unflattering distinction as one of the UK's leading Crap Towns[2], the birthplace of Robbie Williams, and one time 'jewel in the crown' of the fascist British National Party. Some positive coverage has recently come with the BBC's *The Great Pottery Throw Down*, but generally interest has been negative and sporadic. But Stoke hit the zeitgeist proper in 2017.

Despite what Parker calls the 'blinding obviousness' of Stoke's complexity, when I was beginning this research Stoke was being presented in the national media as blindingly and obviously 'left behind' (for example, see a report by Sophy Ridge for Sky News, 2017, that begins with typical mournful music and grey cityscapes). In national media discourses, left behind was a term picked up to explain the shocking, in some quarters, result of the Brexit referendum. Cities like Stoke, once heavily industrial cities that tended to vote Labour, had just voted against a given (and confused and contradictory) idea of Leftism in an angry and unpleasant national political exercise. An answer was needed for this outcome, and the answer was that Stoke and Stokies, and Middlesbrough and anywhere loosely Northern and non-metropolitan, felt left behind by economic and cultural change. Home County

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[2] The first edition of Crap Towns came out in 2003, and across three editions has documented the *crappiest* places to like in the UK. Stoke made the top-10 in the 2013.

Tories were not the face of Brexit: Stoke was.

Figure 2: *Left behind? Self-deprecating tweet from @StokeTruths, parodying the social media '10 year challenge' where users note change over time – suggesting little has changed*

Then there was a byelection, prompted by the sitting Labour MP for Stoke Central leaving for a job at the V&A (a perfect script) and Stoke was thrust front and centre as a case study of left behind Britain. Fuelled by a wider cultural-political anxiety, the national media descended and the news featured regular vox pops of people complaining about closed shops and that leaving the European Union might help – the *taking back control* narrative repeated seemingly endlessly. Stoke had stats to fill gaps for unfamiliar journalists: in 2015 Stoke was widely reported as being 'the most working class city in the UK' (e.g. Scott, 2015, in The Mirror), after collected census data showed the city had the highest percentage of people employed in routine or semi-routine work. Labour did ultimately retain the seat, with Gareth Snell winning for Labour, but the UKIP candidate Paul Nuttall came second[3].

Figures like John Harris of The Guardian – a journalist who has established himself as a go-to on working class disaffection with the modern Left – were central in this, who in his roving touring of unfashionable Britain identified a left behind sentiment and at times perpetuated its blanket

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[3] The Tories now hold Stoke-on-Trent Central – Jo Gideon is the MP.

geography: no one in Manchester or London felt left behind, and everyone in Stoke did[4]. Joe Kennedy (2018) names this general trend toward 'authentocrat' commentary – animated by a political discourse desperately concerned with losing the appeal of 'real people'. Real people are not found in London: but they surely exist in Stoke-on-Trent? This urgent anxiety flattens ideas of working class-ness and flattens ideas of place, and wilts apologetically when anyone with any markers of *realness* says something unsavoury – in so doing affirming an idea that people from Stoke only say unsavoury things. I would add that rather than building new coalitions, this flavour of analysis becomes an engine of division rather than solidarity: recognising resentment, and spinning it into something unhelpful. So while 'left behind' might seem to have some purchase as an orientating critique of uneven development, more so than 'Red Wall' for instance, being so animated by the referendum and a panicking press the result was only a crude analysis – tied as it was to a hardening Leave-Remain geography that made something solid out of something not. Perhaps here was an opportunity to rethink accepted ideas of competitive urbanism – and not *catch Stoke up*? Because does a John Lewis make a city? Pre- and post-Brexit, Stoke became an uncomfortable case study in left behind Britain.

As well as this, in 2017 Stoke-on-Trent was shortlisted for the 2021 UK City of Culture – this like the European competition it is borrowed from, though awarded to less high profile cultural destinations. Stoke didn't win the title, but a very different narrative of place was presented in the process. The bid managed to juggle the different City of Culture paradoxes: at once saying the city was full of culture, but also really in need of support, and articulating an exciting and eclectic idea of culture in a competition that ultimately champions the kinds of cultural practice that stimulate urban regeneration – not so eclectic. The bid video starts: "Culture's all well and good, but can it make it on a wet Wednesday night in Stoke?" (Reels in Motion Video Production, 2017: np) – here referencing football commentator Andy Gray's comment about Lionel Messi, who claimed the famous forward might struggle in the tougher and grittier Premier League (Stoke a symbolic stand-in for this). The bid video goes on: "This is a city that makes art from dirt […] Our time hasn't gone, it's here right now" (ibid: np). The *everyone's an artist* pitch had some purchase in a city where so many people were, and some still are employed in the potteries – ceramics an interesting in-between of industry and craft. In a reflective piece for The Sentinel, the local newspaper, Martin Tideswell (2017) set the bid against the media representations on show either side of the Brexit referendum: "[the bid] changed the narrative from a city in decline to a place full of hope, passion and renewed self-confidence" (ibid:

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[4] After some local backlash, the filmmaker behind Harris' mini-documentaries went on to create the 'Made in Stoke-on-Trent' series that challenged this non-specific place narrative – attempting to demonstrate that Stoke was, it turns out, much more than the 'Brexit capital of Britain': a big media fix to a big media problem.

np). All the activity around the bidding process 'talked up' a city that was so used to talking itself down – and being talked down to.

Figure 3: *Stoke culture – out of this world* (Reels in Motion Video Production, 2017)

I start with all this because 2017 was an interesting time to begin thinking about Stoke and culture – when Stoke went from somewhere not many people were thinking about to somewhere lots more people were thinking about, though with varying degrees of complexity. And in different ways, these discursive events illustrate the problem Bell and Jayne (2006; 2009) identify: that there still isn't a good critical language for discussing small cities. The left behind thesis, which seemed to mainly attach itself to smaller cities like Stoke, is demonstrative in its rapid uptake of this void in understanding – the speed with which places were lumped together only possible without more thoughtful ideas to hand. And aren't people who can't afford the tube in London also left behind? The City of Culture story is different, but the ways the competition implicitly asks cities to describe themselves *the most* ___ and *the best* ___ illustrates a problem of scale. This problem of scale is equally evident at the less celebratory end, when MP-turned-V&A-director Tristram Hunt described Stoke's decline as 'Detroit-style' (in Wigmore, 2015) – these spectacular high and low trappings missing what is maybe smaller and more precise. So, 'might it be possible to reconceive staying small as something other than stagnation or lack of ambition?'

In the rest of this chapter I will introduce what Stoke means to CUSP, before bringing in other literature on the city. I will finish with a longer account of Bell and Jayne's (2006; 2009) thinking on

small cities, and how I try to build on their ideas in this thesis. Doing this, I hope to prove that I am not myself an authentocrat – as I was semi-accused of once at a conference. The question seems fair, as what is more 'real' than darts (!) in Stoke? I think wanting to understand culture and cultural practice in an area crudely labelled 'real' does not make an authentocrat, though. Kennedy (2018) skewers a certain kind of commentary, but other commentary and analysis is surely needed.

2.1 CUSP and Stoke

The CUSP project, in its full breadth, aims to explore means of living well in a world of finite resources. This thesis sits within the Arts and Culture theme, that works from the basis that: "art, creativity and cultural activity are not just instrumental means towards sustainability but integral components of prosperity itself" (Oakley, Ball and Cunningham, 2018: 1). Using a case study approach, the focus is to: "understand the meanings that people attach to [cultural activities], if/how these activities help to locate people within particular communities (either geographic communities or communities of interest) and the role this plays in their lives" (ibid: 2). Stoke-on-Trent is one of three areas of interest for CUSP, along with Hay-on-Wye and Islington, London – Stoke identified as a low growth area, alongside a high growth urban area and a rural area. Here I will begin to introduce Stoke the city, and make clear what Stoke means to CUSP.

> "Though the Potteries lie between, and no very great distance from, Liverpool and Manchester in the north and Birmingham in the south […] there is something so self-contained about them and their peculiar industry that they convey a most unusual impression of provincial remoteness, an impression heightened by their odd littleness and shabbiness […] You feel that nobody comes to the Potteries and nobody – except Arnold Bennett – has left them […] There is something to be said for this cosy personal sort of industry […] but this too helps make the district self-contained and to confirm it in whatever kind of life it has adopted or made for itself." (Priestley, 1933: 212)

> "Stoke seems to be an ill-defined city of in betweens [sic], a city caught between modernity/postmodernity and tradition, the past and the future, old and new industries, tradition and contemporary leisure practices, and between Birmingham and Manchester." (Edensor, 2000: 11)

Amongst other in-betweens, Stoke-on-Trent is between Manchester and Birmingham, as Edensor says – and so between the North and the Midlands. It has a population of around 250,000, and is made up by its six towns – Tunstall, Burslem, Hanley, Stoke-upon-Trent (not Stoke-*on*-Trent), Fenton and Longton – that federated in 1910 and together gained city status in 1925: "the historic compromise" (Parker, 2000: 262). Still known as 'The Potteries', the engine of Stoke's development was the ceramics industry – at its peak 100,000 people were employed in the many potbanks (West, 2016), but the number is now less than 10,000 (The Work Foundation, 2008; Tomlinson and Branston, 2014). The 'historic compromise' was justified on the need for centralised infrastructure and services, but intertown competitiveness has a long history in Stoke – this expressed in the one-upping in both style and cost of town halls during the 18th and 19th century, for instance (Stobbard, 2003). For another in-between, Stoke is still somewhere between a city and a collection of places that don't quite add up to a city – this obvious when arriving at the main train station, and not being anywhere that feels like a city centre (Hanley, the designated city centre, is still a bus journey away).

Where Priestley found Stoke cosy and distinct, this smallness was sustained by its connections: Stoke ceramicists successfully recreated and mass-produced fine tableware like that previously imported from China, this made possible in part by industrialists creating the canal ways that helped bring clay from the South West, and all this giving Staffordshire ceramics a global reputation (Sekers, [1981] 2015). Doreen Massey's famous *A Global Sense of Place* (1994) essay takes the reader on a walk down Kilburn High Road, London, pointing to all the worldly connections that ground a sense of localness. Though it requires more of an imaginative leap, the same can be said of The Potteries – that even while small and cosy in feel, that cosiness was made by something much bigger. And the same can also be said, at least to an extent, for the darts scene and line dancing club – here the imported Americana, and the stories of famous darts players like John Part moving from Canada to Tunstall being significant. For Jayne, with an eye on the present and the trappings of nostalgia: "the name 'The Potteries' appears to suggest exactly what Stoke is about, signalling not only the region's industrial focus but, moreover, an obsessive – and perhaps even dictatorial – mono-industrial economy, and social and cultural life" (2004: 200). It has a unique and distinct history though, which defies any idea of Stoke-on-Trent being a *that place*, as it became around 2017 – a *that place*/bad place.

While not quite post-industrial, Stoke has lost much of its industry: as well as the decline in ceramics production, the mining and steel industries that once thrived are gone. It is the 12th most deprived local authority district of the 317 ranked by the English Indices of Deprivation (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2019). Per The Hardship Report (Stoke City Council, 2015), over

30% of Stoke's residents live in the 10% most deprived areas nationally, and over 15% locally in the 5% most deprived. Stoke is behind the national averages in terms of household income, percentage of population with no qualifications, and percentage employed on minimum wage (ibid) – the headline stats are bad. For CUSP, Stoke is a useful place to think through ideas of sustainable prosperity – being somewhere not often thought of as particularly sustainable or prosperous. What, then, does it mean to lead a rich cultural life in Stoke? What are the possibilities and what are the challenges?

A report by CUSP researchers on 'What Makes for a Good Life in Stoke-on-Trent?' (Burningham and Venn, 2017) hits some familiar refrains on the city: that the loss of industry has changed once neat feelings of attachment to place; that Stoke's six towns are something distinct and meaningful, but this can spill over into a stymying parochialism; that the buses are rubbish; that pride and pessimism exist together; and that young people have a hard time finding good and meaningful work. Writing about experiences of cultural work between the case studies, CUSP researchers Kate Oakley and Jon Ward (2018) also find examples of pride and pessimism in Stoke. For some, cultural work was not something that felt available or attainable – there being 'too little going on', and even when there was something going on it always came back to pots and a cramped and already-told history. However other cultural workers in the city felt inspired by an unfinished and 'malleable' cultural scene. One artist compared Stoke favourably to its larger neighbours: in Manchester everything 'had already been done', but in Stoke there was much more opportunity to do something different. And despite its reputation, access to funding and affordable space made Stoke an attractive place for cultural workers: "creative workers in Stoke can take advantage of the city's material and symbolic resources to construct their version of the good life, one in which economic pressures are reduced and where they play an active and prominent part in shaping a vision for the city" (ibid: 12). Though not unreservedly, Oakley and Ward give a sense of what a smaller and successful cultural economy might look like. In this thesis I follow CUSP's general interest in the meanings and value of cultural pursuits in Stoke.

2.2 Other literature on Stoke

Assessing the shortcomings of culture-led regeneration, Mark Jayne's (2000, 2004, 2012) research reflects the most recent sustained effort of academic research on Stoke. Jayne describes a city struggling to reinvent itself, where what once made the city renowned is now holding it back: "it is difficult to overstate the extent to which the lingering effects of these industrial identifications and socio-spatial structures have ensured not only the concentration of employment into just a few

sectors, but also a dispersal of creative energies into inter-town competition" (2004: 200). Connected cultural and economic practices, ones associated with times of prosperity, rub against a regeneration logic that celebrates entrepreneurship and newness (2000; 2004). Jayne describes Richard Florida-like efforts to develop in the creative cities/creative class fashion – most notably the Cultural Quarter in Hanley. Starting with a grand vision of a new creative hub and a revamped city centre, what manifest more modestly was the redeveloped of two local theatres and a handful of bars and restaurants. Though the Regent Theatre is now able to host larger touring shows, at the time no real local creative scene emerged with it, and thus no cascading creative-economic renaissance. Jayne tells a similar story with the Gladstone St James Design Quarter in Longton, that ultimately failed to excite local interest or attract new businesses. Jayne's tone throughout is distinctly defeated:

> "Each new development [...] gives us a mix of cynicism and excitement, laced with a hint of disappointment [...] Civic pride in Stoke is always partly ironic, always tinged with an acceptance that the city won't ever be a contender, could never match its heftier neighbours." (Jayne, 2000: 21)

Across these different examples, Jayne finds something that this culture of culture-led regeneration is rubbing against. It is something residual and particularly working class, and while culturally dominant is not exactly thriving, instead: "the working classes and working-class spaces and places are in a continuous process of trying to halt losses, rather than trading up and accruing added cultural value" (Jayne, 2004: 963). If urban regeneration efforts of these kind are to succeed, according to Jayne the challenge for policy is to understand the positions people take against this regeneration, and understand these positions on a more cultural level: "[the] dialectic of discourses that surround class and identity formation, and particular economic, political, social, cultural and spatial trajectories of spaces and places" (2004: 202). Charting the rise and political demise of the UK's first openly gay mayor, Mike Wolfe, Mayor of Stoke from 2002-2005, Jayne (2012) gives an account of how, where and why 'traditional' ideas become territorialized and made distinct from more 'cosmopolitan' values that upset a status quo. Though Wolfe's sexuality was seemingly embraced locally early on, and indeed it excited a sense of the outsider looking to shake up a stagnant local politics, when his vision seemed too transformative his sexuality became somehow not Stoke-ish. After a campaign to stop a planned Pride event in the city was successful, the urbane qualities celebrated in other cities were flipped and used to discredit Wolfe as a true outsider. Jayne describes a strong and yet mobile sense of localness and shared history, where development efforts have been met with significant resistance.

If there is appetite for change in the city, structural inadequacies and something more cultural has acted against it. Jayne is describing some of what Oakley and Ward (2018) find, but with increased gentrification in larger cities and cramped cultural scenes, maybe Stoke does in fact offer more than it once did – or maybe the City of Culture *talking up the city* mood was infectious, and Oakley and Ward encountered it.

In *Distress in the City*, Linden West (2016) confirms many of the structural issues Jayne outlines, and is not short on poetic description – Stoke is: "six or more hearts beating disharmoniously" (ibid: 21). West sets out to understand the factors leading to the 'failure' in the city (ibid: 27) – Stoke is doomed from the start. More than doomed, West describes Stoke as a breeding ground for political extremism: "most obviously, where poverty itself is pervasive, racism, xenophobia and fundamentalism find greater, if not inevitable, purchase. There is a potential breeding ground of extremism within a political economy of hopelessness, suffering and everyday violations of intuitive notions of justice" (ibid: 37). School children hope for jobs that no longer exist, and with no middle classes to stimulate post-industrial growth, Stoke continues to struggle. It is, according to West, under these conditions that racism and fundamentalism find inevitable purchase. In seeking to understand how a city has failed, West's is at least a bold way of describing 250,000 people. After finding Stoke a failed and lawless land, West champions communal activities like sewing clubs, and the 'structures of opportunity' found in adult learning initiatives that might yet prove 'an antidote to hopelessness' (Ibid: 55-61). Early on West offers this description: "abandonment seemed an appropriate metaphor as I drove the length of this twelve-mile linear conurbation and observed the disused potbanks and dilapidated buildings of the 'lost city'" (ibid: 20). Perhaps 'I *drove* the length' is as telling as the observation – the account feels detached.

Kim Allen and Sumi Hollyworth (2013) describe Stoke as a sticky place: a place in which cultural and economic capital conspire to limit the choices and horizons of young people in the city – so young people become stuck. Unlike the CUSP case studies, Allen and Hollyworth's research is across three areas around the UK that each have significant markers of deprivation. Stoke though is distinct in its stickiness – while their other examples have at least the feel of proximity to, for instance, creative industries and investment close by, and all this seen as generating at least a sense of possibility, Stoke was by contrast found to be distinctly lacking. Their work challenges the easy 'poverty of aspiration' narrative, suggesting instead more a poverty of opportunity. Creative industries work was described as 'too risky', and what there was in Stoke was 'naff' and unappealing. Young people recognised that pursuing cultural and creative work would mean moving away from Stoke, but a strong sense of

attachment to place cut against this. Allen and Hollyworth highlight defensive characterisations of those working in creative industries – these people talked about as being posh and arrogant and 'geekish': "'making it as a creative (and cosmopolitan) worker means fashioning oneself into a sophisticated, worldly, mobile and individualised worker who is willing to do anything to 'get somewhere'" (ibid: 507). Echoing Jayne (2012), Stoke, and being from Stoke, did not lead to easy identifications with the more sophisticated and worldly worker. Allen and Hollyworth suggest this has something to do with industrial identities and 'hard labour masculinities': "in Stoke on Trent [sic], alongside a depressed local labour market and invisible creative sector, local histories and narratives of loss shaped young people's aspirations" (ibid: 507-508). Knowing the city some, and having fallen for its particular charm, it is tempting for me to batter away such observations as unfair – or quickly point to darts legend Eric Bristow moving from London to Stoke for its excellent darts scene, gotcha! But questions of opportunity and inequality are especially important – even if this issue risks *talking the city down.*

For academic writing on Stoke, *Reclaiming Stoke-on-Trent* (Edensor, 2000) stands out because it is a book about the city – rather than a book about something that has something to do with the city. It was the product of a lively Cultural Studies department at Staffordshire University, and care and familiarity are clear throughout. Among its chapter, Bell (2000) gives a thorough cultural account of the Staffordshire oatcake – specifically the way that place is folded into the pleasures of eating: it being a taste of home. Jill Ebrey (2000) chronicles the peak times of The Torch nightclub in Tunstall, that was a centre for Northern soul music – and where Stoke became a destination for young revellers, even 'exotic', and a place of experimentation. Ebrey wants to reclaim this history as Stoke-ish like the famous industrialist Josiah Wedgewood and author Arnold Bennett, and move beyond the hamster wheel of place narrative. Martin Parker (2000) dives into the 'moral geography' and myriad identifications in the city, and hits on similar tensions to Jayne (2000; 2004): "in general it would seem that nostalgia, and consequent claims to difference, is one way in which the politics of urban restructuring is contested. In that sense, recognising a North Staffordshire identity also means understanding some long running tensions between its various constituent parts" (Parker, 2000: 264). Leaning into this nostalgic voice, and describing attempts to remodel Stoke following a more conventional urban logic: "Hanley has become like everywhere else […] The uniqueness of Stoke-on-Trent, and hence of Tunstall, Burslem and so on, is being swept away by a brutal modernisation. What was once a city of small close knit communities is now becoming anonymous and alien, boarded up shops divided by new roads like the A50 that seem to symbolise the *spatial brutality of 'progress'*" (ibid: 264, emphasis added). While Parker is keen to stress that these tensions and identifications are

more fluid than they might seem – someone is not simply from Burslem, and that is all they are – what is so apparent is that these local identifications matter, and are especially significant in the city. Stoke reads like a rich and involved place-drama – and perhaps here is why the label 'left behind' was rejected: because there is a feeling that something is being lost, rather than something not gained.

2.2 Stoke, a small city

"For amid the Ridley Scott images of world cities, the writing about skyscraper fortresses, the Baudrillard visions of hyperspace … most people actually still live in places like Harlesden or West Brom" (Massey, 1994: 163)

As well as Massey, Jennifer Robinson (2002; 2006; 2013) has made similar criticisms of a problem of scale in urban studies. The idea of the 'city' is one dominated by size and the spectacular – indeed Massey's (2005) idea of the 'throwntogetherness' of cities brings to mind certain places and spaces. What follows is a too easy identification of undeveloped places, given the tools of analysis cannot show anything other than lack in anywhere smaller or less economically advantaged. So cities like Stoke become not-quite cities, and all the while developmentalist and capitalist norms become embedded when concern shifts to what ought to be done about them – because the problem is already understood, as are the solutions. This is the political argument Robinson wants to make. Robinson (2013) goes further critiquing the idea of newness as inherently urban – this at once ignoring what makes that kind of newness possible as it relates to regional and global justice, and failing to advance more progressive ideas of newness and innovation. So long as the things that excite the discipline are born of just a few larger cities, and generally in the Global North, so less developed and less large cities will only ever seem unexciting. In this argument, urban studies takes the shape of a Michael Bay action film – so excited by big explosions and clever camera tricks as to unconsciously change a collective expectation of film, or cities.

Bell and Jayne (2006) share this concern, but rather than dramatically flattening an idea of what makes a city a city, they are interested in what it means to be a small city. More than physical size, they are concerned with: "smallness [as] a qualitative thing as much as anything. Cities where smallness [is] a state of mind, an attitude, a disposition" (ibid: 3). Because while we can say that Stoke is as much a city as Glasgow, size does still matter – just like big cities have brought ideas to mind, so might small cities, and these ideas will be different. They go on: "smallness is in the urban habitus; it's

about ways of acting, self-image, the sedimented structures of feeling, sense of place and aspiration. You are only as small as you think you are – or as other cities make you feel" (ibid: 5). Instead of asking small cities to develop in the fashion of their larger neighbours, what if there was something gold in Stoke? – or at least something ambivalent in its particular nature?

The value of this small cities approach is starting an unfinished discussion of Stoke – and more than unfinished, suggesting smallness as a useful analytic for understanding the city. Particularly with the darts case study, smallness is found in a heightened sense of the particular: the league thrived on a close sense of different pubs and different teams, and this all having meaning. The league was sustained by this smallness and kept it alive, and this all felt big and dramatic. Bell and Jayne hint that smallness has to do with 'sedimented structures of feeling' – here borrowing from Raymond Williams, with 'sedimented' suggesting more embedded and longstanding sentiments, and 'structures of feeling' being Williams' full sense of culture as the complex interaction of cultural forms and histories and institutions and people (this is expanded on in Chapter 4). Later on in Chapter 5, I want to suggest that culture in Stoke is capable of more 'emergent' ideas and affects – this again Williams' language, where the intimacy of the dancers brought about new meanings and changing ideas of cultural value.

It is in this context that the case studies are deliberately chosen. Rather than in decline, here are two examples of culture thriving in Stoke – and as well as being a route into complexity, here I can pick up Bell and Jayne's question about small city successes. In this thesis I work to understand the value and meanings of darts and line dancing, and perhaps offer an account of what it is that Jayne (2000; 2004; 2012) finds so resistant in the city. While this is not a thesis about Stoke, I hope it does not present a thin sense of place. Indeed, when starting this research darts and dancers were quick to ask: 'You're not just interested in talking about how rubbish it is?'. While not writing in the same spirit as the local newspaper, I never wanted to research how rubbish Stoke is: because it isn't rubbish. I reflect on this in the following chapter.

3 Methodology

In this chapter I will describe my methodological approach and discuss my choices and reasoning. In brief, for 12 months I went to line dance classes and played for a darts team in Stoke. The research changed a lot during this period, and in this chapter I will try to make these changes plain and explain how my research developed.

I decided early on to take an ethnographic approach. Firstly, I wanted to take advantage of the relative time-privilege being a doctoral researcher: to think with range and depth through a particular issue. Range and depth are by no means particular to ethnography – rich accounts of value and meaning can be arrived at variously. But an ethnographic approach seemed best to engage with the messy question of where people find value and meaning in their cultural lives – because I was not interested in cultural value and meaning as abstract, so much as particular forms of value and meaning. This is as much a result of asking an ethnographic question as identifying ethnography as an ideal method – one might equally offer an account of cultural value and meaning through mapping exercises or surveys (though *meaning* might be more difficult to map or survey). This was a choice then, and one based in part on what I thought would be interesting and useful, and what I hoped I might be good at. I will describe what I mean by 'ethnographic thinking' (Atkinson, 2017) – this capturing the back and forth between reading and researching as much as the data itself, and not holding too strict an idea of a necessary time and commitment for 'proper' ethnography. Ultimately, it was time spent with dartists and dancers, and reading and thinking with them, that has lead to the central concerns of this thesis.

I will start by introducing my broad methodological approach, and how this informs my use of theory throughout. I will then introduce the case studies, outlining what data I will be presenting, as well as offering some reflections on some successes and challenges in doing this research. I will also explain my ethical considerations. Bringing this thesis together has involved what might be considered retrofitting – that is, the structure and themes only properly emerged after time spent doing fieldwork and beginning to write about it. I won't try and hide this, but instead make clear when and how this happened.

3.1 Ethnographic thinking

In *Thinking Ethnographically* (2017), rather than describing ethnography as a neatly bound research

practice demanding a certain amount of time and access, Paul Atkinson instead sketches an idea of what it means to think in an ethnographic way. In fact, Atkinson is critical of several ethnographic tropes – like the habit that rich observations 'speak for themselves' in their richness, but the truthfulness of these observations alone is a small academic currency (ibid: 2). It isn't the job of the ethnographer to just document events and inhabit the perspective of research participants – there needs to be some translation, and some analysis of those perspectives. What Atkinson does, as well as introducing a variety of helpful ideas, is suggest a healthy relationship between theory, fieldwork, and the knowledge then generated:

> "We bring ideas *to* the field as well as drawing *from* our field data and our experiences. There is a constant, iterative process between data and ideas." (Atkinson, 2017: 4, emphasis in original)

For Atkinson, good theory and useful concepts are those that help guide research and help make sense of all kinds of data, but a dedication to 'grand theory' or bounded traditions, or more pointedly an 'epistemological Zimmer-frame' (ibid: 7), is *not* thinking ethnographically – and to Atkinson not really doing good research. Atkinson wants researchers to think with ideas – 'ideas' preferred to theory precisely because it suggests something more lively and untethered, and 'with' because this engagement is active and unscripted – and throw these together with new research sites to create new knowledge. So while theory helps to guide research, it isn't the only thing that drives it – no punches are pulled when Atkinson describes theoretical debates divorced from social life: "occasionally entertaining as a form of blood sport, it is best left to people who never undertake any research worthy of the name" (ibid: 16). Though this thesis may not fit many standards of ethnography – I didn't live in Stoke, and the time I spent with dartists and dancers beyond my engagement with the practices themselves was in their kindness giving me a bed for the night or offering a lift or buying me a pint – the relationship to theory that Atkinson describes is similar to my own. This description of good ethnographic research resonates with Highmore's (2016a: 116) critique of 'culture-at-a-distance', and this helps shape the darts writing to come. Perhaps Atkinson is describing good research as much as good ethnography – while warning of ethnographic potholes.

There is an interesting question here of bringing ideas to and from the field, as Atkinson describes, and it is worth being clear what ideas I brought with me. As was mentioned in Chapter 1, I hope this

thesis contributes to socialist-minded research – and this is something I brought to the field, but also took from it. Bev Skeggs (1997) describes this tension between political values and 'validity' in ethnographic research, and Skeggs wants to understand validity in terms of 'plausible explanation' more than 'logical coherency' (ibid: 32). As such, Skeggs embraces contradictions and champions research that might disrupt given societal and sociological narratives of class, race and gender – and so reaches for theory that has explanatory value rooted in the always-complex experiences of research participants, that then connects to broader political projects. Given my political leanings, I brought with me what I considered socialist interests, and the justice arguments that help structure this thesis are themselves ideas of value brought into dialogue with the case studies. But I have also taken ideas from the field that challenge these justice arguments, and also challenge my ideas of socialism, and here I am echoing Skeggs' and Atkinson's ideas for qualitative research: to not default to theory that offers 'logical coherency', but reach for ideas that offer 'plausible explanation'.

To give an example, it is with this in mind that I borrow from ethnomethodology in my analysis of the line dancing club. Following from Harold Garfinkel (1967), ethnomethodology puts the focus on bodies, actions, speech and objects in effort to better understand social settings: "ethnomethodologists treat meaning *contextually*, which means that they endeavor [sic] analytically to unpack relational configurations that enable sense to be made and understood *in situ*" (Lynch and Peyrot, 1992: 114, emphasis in original). As I will describe, the ways the dancers broke from routine and convention seemed crucial, exhibiting their own convention, and my understanding of this was helped by literature that put gesture and meaning centre stage. For ethnomethodologists, there is a commitment to not 'ironicise' social actors: to not presume that despite what is being said and done, there is something deeper going on (Laurier and Bodden, 2020: 329). Something deep and meaningful may be going on, but this is uncovered through careful appreciation of setting and action – various research practices and interests focus on forms of sociability, but distinct here is the commitment to find depth in small detail. Laurier and Philo (2006) demonstrate this approach while unpacking the particular hospitality of a café, and their examples of action and reaction are instructive in moving my analysis forward.

And from the darts discussion, after my first trip to a local darts tournament in Stoke, I realised I needed to find a language to explore the heightened feeling of it all – as I ask later in this thesis, and despite my initial interests, I wondered *what is everyday about this?* Here Highmore's *Cultural Feelings* (2017) was helpful in providing a means of discussing collective feeling and mood. I use this and ethnomethodology as examples because they reflect an approach that wants to, invoking justice

again, do justice to the complexity of everyday cultural activities. Attending to this complexity meant reading and researching together, and it was during this year of fieldwork where my research properly developed, and where I sought out literature that offered explanatory value and helped connect to broader cultural justice arguments.

The choice to do something ethnographic, as well as being academic, was also practical. I had never played in a darts league before, nor did I know anything about line dancing. And spending time with these groups and not engaging in the activity would have been stifling in two ways: firstly, because joining in helped in my understanding and in the conversations we could all have, and secondly because sitting at the side would have been considered odd – 'You're not going to just sit there with a note pad, are you?' was one of the first questions I got from the darts team. Taking a more immersive and longer-form approach suited my interests in the various kinds of meaning and value people draw from their cultural lives.

In preparation, during the first year of my PhD studies I attended a National Centre for Research Methods course on urban ethnography, hosted at Goldsmiths, University of London. While this could not prepare me for exactly what was to come, the course was helpful in anticipating research challenges and developing strategies. As well as this, my preparation was greatly helped by other CUSP researchers visiting and thinking about Stoke. Here I was able to bounce around ideas and develop my thinking alongside more experienced colleagues, who undoubtedly helped guide me through my research planning and execution. This feels like a lucky and fairly unique PhD experience in the social sciences – not only connecting with researchers with similar interests, but in the same site. Crucially, I also had to learn to play darts, and at least understand the basics of line dancing. I am indebted to friends and colleagues who joined me at pubs as I worked my way into darts shape, and also to the posters of the many YouTube line dance tutorials I spent time learning with.

3.2 The case studies

On case studies as a research strategy, Robert Yin (2003) identifies two guiding principles: that case studies are appropriate if 'contextual conditions' are thought to be important, and that case studies follow a certain 'logic of design' (ibid: 13-14) – that given the complexity of context fold in various kinds of research data, and prior reading helps arrive at a case study and guide analysis. In many ways I started with a case study interest – darts in Stoke – but to some extent followed this model: the contexts of cultural value and meaning is what I was interested in, and my analysis is shaped by

literature that helped make sense of, and elevate the stakes of any findings by connecting to broader debates. What I don't follow is the more linear research design that Yin suggests: from theory to data to findings. Yin does not think efforts like 'grounded theory', in rejecting hypotheses pre-data and developing hypotheses post-data, are consistent with a case study approach. As such, Yin makes a distinction between a pure ethnography and a case study approach (ibid: 28-29). I am between poles here, as I am not attempting to speak to *a people* and *a culture* like a more classic ethnography might, nor have I tested hypotheses via examples. Rather, I have taken two examples of thriving practices to then think through arguments for cultural justice, and been guided by what emerged during fieldwork.

Early on I decided that I wanted to try and research Stoke's darts scene. 'The Barcelona for darts' was also a lovely quote, lovely enough to be chosen as the title for my thesis. With this interest established, and knowing that I wanted to do something ethnographic rather than using other methods, this meant joining a darts team – or at least becoming well acquainted with one. After searching online, I found Facebook pages for each of the leagues in and around Stoke[5]. I tried to join them, but got no response. I tried to join again with a short message explaining myself, and got no response – I would later learn that only members of darts teams were admitted to these groups. So I had to find a way into the scene offline.

With a loose plan, late on in my first year I set off to Stoke with the aim of doorstepping pubs and asking about darts teams. I started in the town that seemed to have the biggest darts league in terms of teams and divisions, per my online scouting. The first place I tried didn't have a team in the men's leagues, but had a couple in the women's – I told them that sadly I was in no position to start a men's team, not knowing anyone. The second pub weren't keen to take on a new player for their men's teams, and even less keen when I explained that I was a researcher and a novice dartist. The third place I tried was The Brown Bear, where I was lucky to walk in on a darts game between the landlord and one of the team captains. I asked for a pint and explained why I was there. Both Steve, the captain of the men's second team, and Adam, the landlord, were amused as much as anything: 'Wait till we tell the other teams we've got a researcher!'. I then effectively auditioned – playing a few games with Steve and Adam, and I am sure my audition was as much about me as my darts ability.

The darts team I joined was in the Collerton league. Each team was made up of five players plus

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[5] dartsinstoke.co.uk is a useful resource, and lists 13 leagues around Stoke. For context, London is the only other city I have found with a similar website, and capitalarrows.com lists 11 leagues.

substitutes, and on game nights all five players played against someone from the other team. The games were three legs long, a leg being one game of 501[6], and each leg helped decide the winner on the night – and this result was fed into a league table to decide an overall winner for the year. Around Stoke there were also singles and doubles leagues – players completing individually or in two-person teams. The Collerton league ran throughout a calendar year with a break in summer, and each team played an equal number of home and away games at different pubs. As described at the start of Chapter 4, the league also put on other darting events throughout the year.

The line dancing club is the great happy accident of my research. I knew I wanted a second case study to give my thesis some balance, as I wasn't trying to do an ethnography of Stokie darts per se, so much as engaging ethnographically with ideas of culture and value in Stoke – where darts is very popular. One of my supervisors, who luckily for me was familiar with the city, suggested I look into line dancing. After some Googling I found Lynda's classes, and on another trip to Stoke at the end of my first year went along to introduce myself. Here I didn't have to audition as such, but it helped that I had done my best to learn some basic steps before attending.

The classes took place weekly at a working men's club on the outskirts of the city, and were attended by 30-50 people each week – the vast majority of whom were not newcomers. Lynda had been teaching classes there for 16 years, and on-and-off at other venues for longer – at the time of my research Lynda taught four classes a week. As well as her teaching, Lynda choreographed line dance routines, many of which are well known in the broader scene. These classes I joined were pitched at 'intermediate' level – each evening beginning with some beginner level routines, then advancing to more technical dances later. The styles and steps of line dancing are introduced in much more detail later in Chapter 5, as are the particularities of these classes.

In *The Lost Ethnographies* (2019), Robin James Smith and Sara Delmont bring together different accounts of ethnographic struggle that centre around loss: lost funding, lost fieldnotes, lost focus and losing your way. Almost all the darts players at The Brown Bear, and a significant number of the line dancers, had previously pursued their hobbies elsewhere – either at a different darts team or different line dance classes. These other experiences, of stricter line dance classes or less comradely darts teams, are lost from this research beyond brief description. As a result, what is lost perhaps is a

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[6] Taking turns, each player counts down from 501 to finish on zero, but always having to finish on a double – so if you needed 40, you had to hit double-20, which is a smaller section of the board, more difficult. Sometimes playing 501 you have to 'double in' – hitting a double before starting the countdown – but this wasn't done in the Collerton league.

critical edge, where particularly with Lynda's classes I struggle to hide my partisanship. In fact I end up suggesting something that I find challenging – that some spaces and activities are necessarily closed, and this needs thinking through. This suggestion is a result of my research design and intent, to look for thriving culture in Stoke, but it does limit the thesis. As I describe shortly, though, loss still shaped this research – and productively shaped it.

3.3 Finding structure

As is typical of research conducted on a three-year timetable (though I have gone far over my three years), I began fieldwork proper at the beginning of my second year, in September 2017. For the first three months I attended line dance classes and followed the darts team round as a substitute to home and away games in the Collerton league. During this time I was taking regular fieldnotes and trying to get a sense of the activities I was observing and participating in, and keeping track of conversations via quick notes written on my phone. It seems important to say that bar only a few occasions, after introducing myself, dancers and dartists were keen to help me out in any way they could and to share their thoughts. While in many ways this was an exciting and interesting time, it was also very disorientating. I lost really any sense of why I was there or what I was researching – as I will discuss, being met with 'this is just a bit of fun' comments made me think *well, maybe it is just a bit of fun, what else is there to say?* As I found though, 'fun' covers all manner of meaning.

Like the 'just a bit of fun' comments, early on I was regularly told by both dartists and dancers that 'it's not just about the darts/dancing', but 'everything else'. While this goes on to inform lots of the writing to come, it was challenging at the time – what is 'everything else', and what is its connection, if any, to darts and dancing? Many of the line dancers spent a good portion of the evening sitting down – when so many weren't dancing, why was I interested in dance? These were useful questions, but difficult ones too.

To extend the question of loss and ethnography, this unmooring I felt in the field, losing my sense of purpose and focus, fundamentally changed the research. I realised that whilst I was interested in the value people ascribed to their leisurely pursuits, I had paid very little attention to the question of value itself: what does it mean to value something? What about the values expressed in evaluation? And why does this all matter – what is the role of research here? *Someone likes doing something, so what?* I needed, or certainly wanted an answer to *so what?*, and addressing this I invested in two different ideas of cultural justice. The structure of this research then is mirrored in its writing –

starting with darts and the argument for 'everyday participation' (Miles and Ebrey, 2016; 2017), then onto line dancing and Banks' (2017) idea of creative justice. These ideas each provide an answer to *so what?*, but start from very different places. As my fieldwork continued I began to think with more purpose about both darts and dancing through these different arguments. Presenting my research in this thesis, it has made sense to keep this structure, and present an evolving argument – engaging with different literatures as I go.

With these anchoring ideas, I then had something to hang any insights on. So as I began to focus on the attitudes toward mistakes at the line dancing club, and the everyday excellence of the darts scene, these didn't feel like isolated observations – but things that contributed to a larger debate around how to understand and value cultural practices.

3.4 Research data

The ethnographic elements of this research compromise participant observation, participatory insights, and conversations with regulars during this time. After my initial disorientation, and being helped by my supervisors and friends to recognise what needed addressing, the following 10 months of fieldwork were more fruitful than the initial unmoored stage. I hesitate to say I ever developed an 'insider' perspective, perhaps just more familiar, but over time these more familiar fieldnotes helped shape the arguments I present in this thesis. I do not, however, analyse them like a text – instead the diary helped me keep track of informal conversations and observations, and later in the analysis chapters I will use amended fieldnotes at points to introduce ideas and give necessary colour.

From June 2018, following the initial period of participant observation, I started formally interviewing some of the dartists and dancers. I interviewed 13 dancers in total, and the five regulars on the darts team plus the league manager. Quoted briefly in the darts chapter, I also attended an administrative meeting of the women's darts division in the same league, and facilitated an impromptu focus group of sorts – a major regret is not spending more time with female dartists in Stoke, beyond those that played at The Brown Bear. I also interviewed Ian White, who at the time of interview was the internationally highest ranked men's darts player playing in the city.

These closing interviews, that took place after a large chunk of fieldwork, were key to my research, as I was able to explore the emerging themes to date. The interviews themselves did not have any structure, and often circled back to something that myself and the interviewee had discussed another

time, but now in more detail. These conversations were helped by the mutual understanding that had built over the proceeding months – under the next header I write about these changing conversations specifically. Skeggs (1997) describes discussing interpretations and ideas with research participants over more than a decade, and while I spent far less time with the dancers and dartists, I also found this back and forth valuable. Building up to these interviews we had all, myself included, gained some shared understanding of my research project, and though I can't pretend we used the same language to describe these everyday cultural activities – this label saying it all, really – we had established my interest in the 'everything else' that the dartists and dancers had helpfully pointed me towards. As such, in these interviews, and in the conversations nearer the end of my fieldwork more generally, I was sharing some of the ideas that make up chapters 4 and 5, and the resulting discussions were intensely valuable.

For the darts players, the interviews took place either at The Brown Bear or other pubs close by. This was a practical but also conscious choice: to talk about the thing in a familiar setting. For similar reasons I chose to interview the line dancers at the working men's club hall, while the classes were going on. This was less successful in some ways, as dancers were naturally keen to get back to dancing. But where independent travel was an issue for some of the regulars, and the club being slightly out the way, this was a fine compromise.

In terms of my data then, I ended my period of fieldwork with these interviews and many other jotted conversations, sections of fieldnotes that described what I saw and what I was thinking, and with the beginnings of the arguments I wanted to make. In terms of organising this data, I collected different elements around these emerging themes – for instance, I knew I wanted to think about the ways line dancers treated mistakes while dancing, and make a link to a broader sensibility at the club. With this and other similar sketches in mind, I pieced observations and comments and stories together that spoke to these ideas, and with them began to develop my arguments. This often resulted in more reading and more thinking, and so any analysis of this data is not divorced from further searching for understanding – or as Skeggs calls it, 'plausible explanation'. As such I did not have a formal approach to coding or organising the data, but rather began to think with the ideas I was developing and searched for connections between interviews and observations – organising comments around narratives of place, for instance, but always wanting to make further links.

3.5 Changing conversations

Having suggested that the kinds of conversations I had changed during the process of my fieldwork, I want to give some space to elaborate a bit more – as here are some lessons. When first starting, many of the dartists and dancers were confused about the nature of my research project. And as well as being confused, several were defensive. 'You're not just going to write about Stoke being rubbish, are you?' As well as finding the idea of a PhD on darts and dancing bizarre, there were also reservations about my intent. 'How long are you going to be coming along for?' 'A year?!' While my year of joining in only made PhDs seem more bizarre to the dartists and dancers, the time spent did at least communicate an earnest wish not to use treasured leisure time as a means to make a cheap point about a city many had complicated feelings towards.

This wasn't the most significant way the conversations changed, though. For the first couple of months, conversations rarely got beyond how fun and how great each activity was. This, I think, was for a couple of reasons. Firstly, 'fun' and 'great' are easy covers for all kinds of feelings and experiences, and easy to default to. And extending this line of thinking, it can be embarrassing to stretch oneself beyond these easy covers. Extending this even further, darts and line dancing are not born of a milieu that encourages or necessarily celebrates a kind of *talking up* of cultural experience – in the darts world, this is what made the late commentator Sid Waddell, who is later quoted in Chapter 4, unique. One can read this laconic stance as working class in some way, or at least not high culturally middle class, but the effect was playing down rather than waxing lyrical on the value of this or that. So for a while everything was 'good' and 'fun', and not much was articulated or articulatable beyond that.

Hennion's (2001) paper on taste and amateur musicians, that is made good use of later in this thesis, wrestles with a different but not dissimilar problem. Hennion observes the way interviewees are 'sociologized' to the point of guilt and shame for their preferences, and anticipate any charge of elitism with swift apology: "they no longer talk of objects, gestures, their feelings, the uncertainties that make the difficult career of the aficionado so charming. Instead, they put themselves in the categories they suppose are being held out for them and have only one concern: not to appear unaware of the fact that their taste is a sociological question" (ibid: 5). This makes the job of the sociologist difficult, given interviewees are already wrestling with their own sociology. The way round this, for Hennion, is to not ask about preference, and to ask about the doing: "not [asking about] what they liked […] but their ways of listening, playing and choosing, and of what was happening" (ibid: 5-

6). This method of 'real listening' was productive for Hennion's work with musicians in escaping discursive dead ends, and worked best with participants reflecting in the presence of their instruments and musical settings.

While the dartists and line dancers were not nervous about coming off as snobs, there are some parallels here in how participants are used to (and not used to) talking about the things they love. And like Hennion, my conversations and interviews were helped by them taking place in familiar settings – either sitting at the side of the dance floor, or in the pubs and working clubs that the darts league floated around. Here I was able to get beyond 'fun' and 'great' in more ranging discussions that didn't start with 'So, why do you like it?'.

The second major reason for the changing conversations was that when starting out I didn't have detailed research questions, for better and worse. For better this meant that a loose interest in why things are valuable to people meant I was able to roll with an evolving idea of the relationship between line dancing and grief, for instance. But the problem was that when asked 'So what is it that you want to know?', at the beginning I couldn't say much beyond 'Well, why do you like it?' 'It's great' and 'It's fun' are the obvious answers to this – this was at least a bit easier with the darts players, where there was such a myth around Stoke darts to tap into, and the reasons why I would be interested therefore seemed more obvious. The things that seemed specifically interesting to me came over time, though – as well as asking about doing and practice and setting like Hennion, things needed to happen to spark conversations.

The first big thing that happened with the darts case study was a knock-out tournament – my fieldnotes on this open the next chapter. Here an obvious contradiction made itself obvious: I was interested in everyday things, but 100 people gathering round a dart board on a Tuesday evening is hardly ordinary, at least outside a professional setting. Rather than 'What is darts in Stoke like?', I could start asking 'What is this tournament like?', and ask myself 'What is normal, and yet not at all normal about this experience?' As discussed, this impacted what theory I sought out to help my analysis. At the line dancing club, midway through the fieldwork one of the partners of the group died. While line dancing was described by regulars as 'a bit of fun' before then, this started different conversations around dancing and grief – this something I had no idea about before starting, and heavily informs the arguments I try to develop in Chapter 5.

Reflecting on this, I am not sure interviews alone would have helped me understand the value and

meanings of these activities. Even if I had more developed research questions before beginning, and perhaps was a better interviewer – this is certainly a skill I better developed as I went along – it seems unrealistic to expect the participants to begin to talk about something as intimate as grief without getting to know me, and getting to know what I was interested in. It was fantastic and essential that the conversations changed during the fieldwork, as I am not sure I would have much of a thesis without them changing, and this is important to highlight – in terms of trying to understand why, and in giving myself and the dartists and dancers the space and time to understand how they might contribute.

3.6 Positionality

Addressing my positionality – I am not from a working class background, and I have explored ideas of cultural value and meaning in settings different from where I was brought up. My markers of (hipster) middle class-ness are obvious: I wear trousers that are too short, sport scruffy Dr. Martens and I wear round glasses, and I didn't *dress down* for fieldwork. And regarding the line dancers, I write about ageing and grief without having lost a partner and without a hip replacement. It is hard for me to understand the effect of my positionality in this research, but I would say on a few occasions I was met with wariness – and more so in the darts league. As discussed later in Chapter 4, one of the darts players makes it clear that darts in Stoke is not for 'posh knobs', and I have some of the markers of a posh knob. I was helped by one of the many chances in this research – that John, the describer of 'posh knobs' and 50-year veteran of the Stoke darts leagues, was on my team at The Brown Bear. John seemed to like me and like the research, so would often introduce me at league nights and tournaments. John had lots of credibility, and so offset some of my posh knob-ness.

Being from the North East of England, for a long time I have been aware of the effect Geordies have in different settings – from expectations of good humour and lovers of drink, being 'the okay English' in Scotland, and having a certain authentic cache in a variety of settings. Particularly with the darts case study, being a Geordie was at times a winner – my accent came out in its fullness during recorded interviews. Had I been researching in a different setting, I am sure my flexible accent would have flexed another way. This speaks to the setting, where authenticity of one kind held currency, and also the strange authenticity-game of doing qualitative research – to appear 'real' despite the obvious oddness of the situation. Again, Skeggs (1997) reflects on these unusual relationships, and how class can figure: "I experienced my position as privileged researcher […] as deeply disturbing, generating an uncertainty about positioning which in turn influenced the research production by injecting tension, a

result of my projected anxiety, into our relationships" (ibid: 35-36). Skeggs describes a different experience to my own, as I was not feeling a transition away from a shared set of challenging circumstances through my position as a researcher, but I have tried as much as possible to not let any 'projected anxiety' define the research – and I am grateful to my supervisors, my friends and my family for helping here in giving me ample space to reflect on the unusual relationships I was building. So while at times I felt out of place, I didn't want these early experiences to define the overall project. And like Skeggs, I did finish the research with friendships that had gone beyond any stricter idea of researcher-researchee.

Gengler and Ezzell (2018) describe some different complications around impression management, of both the research and the researcher, when doing an ethnography. Discussing presentation of self, they highlight a variety of studies that have demanded researchers be either upfront about their interests or need to be more covert – because of personal risk, or because too much honesty would pollute the mood. In terms of presentation of project, they find again that access at times demands a certain carefulness around research aims and sometimes necessarily keeping analyses hidden. And in terms of sharing research findings and opening a dialogue with participants, Gengler and Ezzell list examples of successes in sharing and successes in not. Addressing these comments individually: in terms of presentation of self, whilst my accent was perhaps stronger, I did not hide my being there as a researcher or a PhD student. It wasn't always practical to go up to players on the other team and introduce myself, so some discretion was needed – here is the challenge of researching something you don't want to spoil, and maintaining the leisurely affect you want to explore. Secondly, I did not need to manage what people thought of my research – 'Why is this valuable?' was a reasonable question, though the length and depth of my interest sometimes provoked confusion. And finally in terms of sharing, some of the most fruitful moments in this research came from sharing some of my thinking with the dartists and dancers, though this was done in a relatively unplanned way, not as a pre-planned element of the research process. In this sense, the ethnographic elements of this research did not present some of the classic ethnographic challenges.

Finally in terms of positionality, being white and being in, except for a handful of exceptions, spaces that were not ethnically diverse, I am sure has impacted this research – when I have ever tended to romantic commentary with non-white friends on the communitarian ethics of this or that in Stoke, many were quick to ask: 'Well, would I be able to walk in there?' My answer is that I am not sure. As ever, we need more people from more diverse backgrounds looking at more things.

3.7 Ethics

The main ethical considerations for this research were around issues of informed consent, considering I would be spending time in pubs and clubs where it would not be practical to speak to all the punters and fully explain my being there – as well as not being practical, it would have been an imposition. To manage this, it was acknowledged in my submission for ethical approval that I would not always be able to gain written or verbal consent, but if entering into any longer conversation with anyone I did not already know about something relating to my research interests, I would inform them of me asking in my capacity as a PhD student. In the end this was only a concern in the darts league, as the cast of line dancers did not change during my fieldwork, and was helped by people like John introducing me and doing some of the explaining for me – and the nature of my interests leading naturally to me acknowledging why I was asking such questions.

Regarding consent of regular research participants, I submitted for ethical approval that I would gain either written or verbal consent. For verbal consent, I scripted an introduction to my research project, and made clear that my presence may be reasonably considered disruptive, and if anyone felt uncomfortable I would stop playing for the darts team and stop attending the line dance classes. For both case studies, after first speaking to the darts team captain and to Lynda, I met the groups and gave out information sheets describing my research, and encouraged the dartists and dancers to think about whether I would be welcome or not. I checked in at various points throughout the year to try and make sure my presence was still welcome.

Across both case studies, names and particulars have been changed to keep participants anonymous. The name of the darts league has been changed – there is no Collerton darts league in Stoke. Ian White's name is not changed, this the professional darts player I quote later in Chapter 4, and this was discussed prior to interview. My Ethics Committee Approval is found in the appendix of this document.

4 The Barcelona for darts

Adapted fieldnotes:

Once a year the league puts on a singles tournament. The venue is a drive away and I end up in the back of Tony's van on a chair from the pub. Most choose to stay put and watch the England football match and enjoy some friendly games, but John and I go along to support Tony – who is representing the team. There is only one other seat in the front, hence me in the back trying not to fall over going round corners.

After 20 hairy minutes we arrive at a large and unremarkable looking working men's club. It sits in the middle of a long row of houses opposite a takeaway, fronted by a large parking lot. Being winter it is dark. A dull yellow glow escapes the frosted glass windows. I exit ungraciously from the boot.

Figure 4: *The glowing parking lot*

The front bar is too big for the regulars to fill. Chairs are moved into clusters all facing a TV, but despite this small act of spatial rebellion the room still feels very uniformed – the furniture

screaming its functionality. The exterior unremarkable-ness looks confirmed. The tournament though is being held in the back hall, and opening these doors we are welcomed into a humming scene.

The set-up here is very different, the momentum of the room all building toward a stage – the tables around the edges all pointing inward. There are five dart boards, all illuminated by a ring of lights. About eight players are queued behind each oche, still 30 minutes away from starting but eager to warm up. 50 or so people are gathered around watching. There is a sense of occasion and a line at the bar.

Tony has been playing darts for 50 years. He started when his parents put up a board in their living room. The room wasn't big enough for him to stand the proper distance so he had to throw from the hallway with the door propped open. At his pomp Tony played five nights a week, but now plays three or four. Over the years he has played most of the big names in the Stoke darts scene.

After getting a drink John and I find a space near the back. John is in his 70s and has played in the Stoke leagues for over 50 years – and you can tell, people keep coming up to him to say hello. John used to play six nights a week but now only plays two nights. He jokes: 'If I didn't play darts I wouldn't know anybody'.

Eventually Tim, who runs the league, shouts loud enough to get everyone's attention. Players are divided up by the division of the team they are representing – top two divisions grouped together and the bottom two together. Tim calls out the first four match-ups. It is a knockout format so your night is as long as you can make it.

With five games going on at once my attention bounces around the room, following the latest groans and cheers. In the far corner, where the higher division games are going on, the standard is similar to what you might see on TV. I say this to John and his friend, who point out that many of them have played in televised events.

Tony cruises through his first game, not playing particularly well but doing enough to get by. In his second game Tony's opposite starts with a 140 then 180, Tony answering with his own 180 then 139, eventually finishing with a good two dart check-out – the standard has shot up.

Tony catches John's eye and mouths: 'Large whiskey please'.

Time flies. As players are knocked out they join the swelling crowd as the atmosphere builds. It is intoxicating and I am intoxicated. Having spent a long time reading about 'ordinary' and 'mundane' experiences, at some point I write in the notes on my phone: 'It doesn't feel ordinary'.

In this chapter I hope to do two things. First, I want to explore what it means to call Stoke 'the Barcelona for darts'. The quote is from Phil Taylor[7] – the 16-time world darts champion: Stoke's biggest darting star. This comment, in its humour and defiance, has shaped this research and especially this case study. On one level the comparison is incongruous – Barcelona, rather than Stoke, is the feature of holiday adverts promising wonderful escape from boredom. This is what makes the comparison amusing, even cheeky. But if there were travel companies specifically targeting darts players around the world, perhaps those adverts would splash pubs and clubs from around the six towns.

Barcelona here can be read two ways, both of which involve some caricature. First, Barcelona is Gaudi and tapas: symbolically, Barcelona is shorthand for high European cultural capital. If a city is compared to Barcelona this is generally a compliment – the same cannot be said of Stoke-on-Trent. Read this way, Phil Taylor is flipping an idea of cultural capital – if galleries and sangria are your thing then go to Barcelona, but Barcelona is not the destination for dartists. Leaning into the caricature, Stoke is high culture for beer and pub games – while this isn't 'high' culture in a traditional sense, Taylor is perhaps suggesting there are other standards for cultural excellence. So the comparison is also, to an extent, pointed. Stoke is high culture for darts: Stoke is the Barcelona for darts.

Barcelona is also FC Barcelona: in terms of sporting culture and infrastructure, Barcelona is synonymous with footballing excellence. La Masia, the Barcelona youth academy, has produced many of the best players in the world – their Lionel Messi to Stoke's Phil Taylor. Camp Nou, the team's stadium, has hosted the most successful European teams. And FC Barcelona has played some of the most attractive and progressive styles of football – here the two readings of Barcelona fold into each other. But this isn't inverting an idea of cultural capital as much as employing a given standard of

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[7] As best as I can find, the quote is from Phil Taylor. It was posted in speech marks by *The 7th Town*, the production team behind a charming documentary called *Oatcakes*, along with his picture.

sporting excellence – the way you think of Barcelona and football, so you should think of Stoke and darts. When starting this research, four of the world's top 10 darts players were Stoke players. There are enough leagues in Stoke to play competitively every night of the week. Stoke has unrivalled darting infrastructure: Stoke is the Barcelona for darts.

What does it mean to call Stoke 'the Barcelona for darts', then? Taking these readings together, it certainly means that place is important – place matters in how you figure culture and practice: for both Stoke and Barcelona. Phil Taylor's quote is a rich starter for a discussion of taste, place, culture and value. Barcelona as high culture, perhaps even snobbishly so, and Stoke as not so snobbish but equally meaningfully cultural, is indignant and full of populist and class-conscious sentiment. At least in my reading, Taylor values forms of participation that don't sell themselves to middle class holidaymakers, and that don't fit a more traditional understanding of culture and cultural practice. Each of these case study chapters is organised around an idea of cultural justice – and here it is justice for all the things ignored. 'Everyday participation' has emerged as a term that demands recognition for things ignored and overlooked (Miles and Gibson 2016; 2017). Our understandings of cultural practice are too narrow, so the argument goes, and informed by too limited a sense of what is considered cultural and therefore meaningful. The second thing I will do in this chapter is offer some commentary on this cultural value argument – that is at once compelling, and at times difficult to work with.

This chapter starts by introducing the argument for everyday participation. There are some tricky questions for this attempted turn: is everyday participation too flat a label, lumping too many things together? And while critical in one sense, is it not critical in others? Raymond Williams' *Culture is Ordinary* essay ([1958] 1989) is introduced here, that influences this research variously. I then outline what I mean by 'everyday' in this research. Everyday participation gives one sense of the everyday, but as is apparent in the fieldnotes that start the chapter, 'everyday' is full of contradictions. These contradictions are highlighted across both the darts and line dancing discussions, where they remain usefully unresolved.

The fieldwork is introduced under two headings: first Stoke, then *Barcelona*. Using mostly interviews, I first discuss the way that Stoke and darts were talked about together. This complicates a sense of taste and place, but still affirms the importance of that connection. Then onto *Barcelona*, using Ben Highmore's *Cultural Feelings* (2017) as a frame to explore what made Stoke Barcelona-like at the right pub on the right night. Everyday participation is a useful starter, but as this chapter continues other

value arguments are introduced. The chapter concludes with some reflections on the value of Stoke darts, and the value of valuing. Running across both chapters is an oft-repeated refrain from the fieldwork: that darts and line dancing aren't just about the darts and dancing, but 'everything else'. Each share a sense that neither can be understood and distinguished crudely by activity, but that the activity is still productive in that 'everything else'. What to value, if you chose to value, becomes difficult.

The loudest voices in this chapter are Ben Highmore and John – the darts player in the opening fieldnotes. Highmore first provides a guiding criticism of 'at-a-distance' cultural accounts, and establishes a way of thinking about the everyday and everyday things as (usefully) paradoxical. As well as *Cultural Feelings*, Highmore's argument for a more expansive sense of cultural taste makes a break from everyday participation. John makes several contributions in this chapter that clarify the difficulties in developing a value argument, whilst showing the worth of trying.

Smallness is not the main question in this chapter, but smallness continually pops up. Darts in Stoke is at once big and small: big in reputation and provision, but also small in its intimacy. Smallness, I would argue, has to do with familiarity and prizing familiarity, but that familiarity can also feel quite big. Invoking Barcelona, Phil Taylor illustrates the same urban imaginary that Bell and Jayne (2006) observe: that city means big, and bigger means more city-like. Stoke needs Barcelona as metaphor – because what is Barcelona the Stoke of? But smallness does not mean piddly. Where smallness thrives, that smallness needs to also feel big – whether it is local politics or a thriving darts scene. The darts game that Ian White describes shortly is a great illustration of this.

Ultimately, in this chapter I will conclude that what is valuable about darts in Stoke is that it is so valued – the scale of the scene offers dartists plenty of opportunities to engage in their prized fun and sociability. And more than this, darts in Stoke provides the basis for meaningful attachments, or 'commitments':

> "Commitments come to constitute our character, identity and conception of ourselves, such
> that if we are prevented from pursuing them, then we suffer something akin to bereavement,
> for we lose not merely something external, but part of ourselves […] There is thus no clear
> distinction between our own flourishing and that of our commitments; they are fused."
> (Sayer, 2011: 125)

While this idea of 'commitments' does not forgo other questions of value, it seems the most intuitive argument to conclude with: it is important that the things we care about are cared about.

4.1 Everyday participation

Here I want to introduce the term everyday participation and offer some commentary on its fit in this thesis. Emerging from the Understanding Everyday Participation (UEP) project, everyday participation is an admirably stubborn effort at addressing the policy problem of non-participation in the arts. There is, in fact, no such thing as non-participation: just different forms of participation. The problem is that these other, or 'everyday' forms of participation aren't properly understood and valued, and cultural commentators have failed to properly address this bias in understanding. As well as policy, there are theoretical and methodological challenges baked into this doggedly broad view of cultural practice. Here I will contextualise this dogged broadness, and elaborate on its kind of cultural justice: justice for all the things ignored.

The term everyday participation emerges from critique:

> "There is an orthodoxy of approach to cultural engagement which is based on a narrow definition (and understanding) of participation, one that focuses on a limited set of cultural forms, activities and associated cultural institutions but which, in the process, obscures the significance of other forms of cultural participation which are situated locally in the everyday realm." (Miles and Gibson, 2016: 151)

Everyday participation signals an interest in things obscured and overlooked, and the rejection of a cultural deficit model (Miles and Sullivan, 2010; 2012) – a model where places and people are deemed more or less culturally engaged by their uptake with already-understood cultural practices. Looking at continued problems of poor attendance in state-sponsored arts activities by anyone not white and well off and middle class (Taylor, 2016), in which the sectors themselves have evolved to reflect increasingly instrumental economic-cum-cultural concerns (Oakley, 2004), the response here is to rethink the remit of arts and cultural funding – and not continue down a path of widening

participation. In sum: people and places aren't less culturally engaged, culture is more than plays and paintings. What about everything other than opera? Everyday participation builds on Pierre Bourdieu's (1984) famous critique of aesthetics, and centres place in any understanding of cultural value and participation – so challenging a 'methodological nationalism' that won't see place as foundational to how a person or group find meaning and value in their cultural pursuits. Phil Taylor captures the spirit of this: Stoke isn't a cultural 'cold spot' (Gilmore, 2013), it is a cultural hub if you are willing to rethink what is and what isn't meaningful cultural practice.

Bourdieu is foundational to this proposed rethinking of cultural value, and then cultural funding. Bourdieu saw cultural preference and taste, and the notion and promotion of good and sophisticated tastes, as inextricably linked to class struggle:

> "Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier. Social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make, between the beautiful and the ugly, the distinguished and the vulgar, in which their position in the objective classifications is expressed or betrayed.
>
> The denial of lower, coarse, vulgar, venal, servile – in a word, natural – enjoyment, which constitutes the sacred sphere of culture, implies an affirmation of the superiority of those who can be satisfied with the sublimated, refined, disinterested, gratuitous, distinguished pleasures forever closed to the profane. That is why art and cultural consumption are predisposed, consciously and deliberately or not, to fulfil a social function of legitimating social differences." (Bourdieu, 1984: 6,7)

Refusing the neat appraisal of cultural objects and practice, and instead analysing and historicising the appraising of these objects and practices, Bourdieu inserts some sociology into aesthetic concerns. 'Disinterested' aesthetic criticism is an invention that serves to mystify the uninitiated and make those able to engage distinct from those that aren't. So a taste for darts or Debussy gives away our position in a classed society. And the way darts, but probably Debussy, is appreciated either in a more detached and *aesthetically inclined* manner, or in a cruder 'vulgar' style, maintains those distinctions by taste and the way tasting is done. Our preference is arbitrary as it relates to the cultural thing in question, but is essential as a function of social inequality – cultural capital of this kind is always linked

with other forms of capital, including economic capital. It is a damning criticism of a society that won't interrogate how it comes to understand art and beauty.

This argument drives the interest in everyday participation: beyond 'high' culture, what do people like doing? Why do they like doing it? And how might we see it as meaningful and valuable? There is though an effort to move on from Bourdieu, who was ultimately dismissive of 'low' tastes in so far as they only illustrate and affirm bounded class structures (Bennett, 2011), and who neglected the role of place in taste. Bourdieu doesn't find sophistication or meaningful judgement or any political possibilities in working class cultural habits, focusing instead on the ways that aesthetic experiences and aesthetic judgements are denied to those already marginalised. This reflects a broader political project in which working class cultures are important in illustrating persistent and networked inequalities, but are always 'vulgar' in some fashion. Bourdieu then is more of a jumping-off point, with everyday participation embracing vulgar tastes, and not seeing them as necessarily vulgar.

At professional events, before *I'VE GOT THE POWER* boomed and the fireworks went off, Phil Taylor's crowd introduction started with 'Fanfare For The Common Man'. Despite the new glitz of Sky Sports money and a maxi-showbiz aesthetic, at the professional level darts still retains a sense of unpretentiousness and working class-ness – and something always unlikely in its superstars. Here Sid Waddell, the late-commentator and definitive voice of darts, revels in the vulgarity of a famous darts venue:

> "The Circus Tavern looks like a truck-stop that turns into a niterie. It looks a bit like a warehouse and it hosts strippers, dodgy comics and stag nights. If it was in Alabama you would call it redneck heaven […] The Pukka pies are good and the session lager is cheap and potable […] Rusty tangled Christmas tinsel, messages on greasy chip plates, an atmosphere that is simply inspirational. Keep your Wembley and your Henley. Give me the working-class poetry of darts." (Waddell, 2008: 146)

Waddell's thick description celebrates an unpretentious setting, and finds something meaningful and poetic in it. There is nothing high culture about The Circus Tavern, but seen on its own terms it is simply inspirational. Another Sid Waddell commentary-quotable is an even better fit for the everyday participation argument: "they're showing Shakespeare's Othello over on BBC1 but if you want real drama tonight, get down here to Jollees, Stoke-on-Trent" (Waddell, nd: np). From 1979-1985 Jollees

Cabaret Club in Longton, Stoke-on-Trent hosted the World Professional Darts Championship – at a boom time for darts with household names like Eric Bristow and Jocky Wilson in their prime, and the sport benefiting from better mainstream TV coverage (Davis, 2018). To Waddell, as was typical of his commentary, in darts one could find the same drama and spectacle usually reserved for Shakespeare and the like, if only you looked for it. Everyday participation wants to look for value and meaning elsewhere as Sid did: taking working class culture seriously, but not so seriously to miss the fun of it.

The 'everyday' in everyday participation is not accidental. Cultural policy discourses, in research and practice, have: "become the province of networks of cultural 'experts', rather than being grounded in everyday lived experiences. It is, therefore, an idea of cultural life that is offered to communities rather than one sought from them about what might be useful and enjoyable on their terms" (Ebrey, 2016: 165). For UEP, 'everyday' isn't queuing for the loos in a theatre or getting cramp in the second act, it's beyond the theatre – academics and policymakers are too obsessed with plays and poems and the spectacular, missing 'everyday lived experience'. Recognising a disjuncture everyday participation is a populist alternative: "by opening up, rather than pre-empting, discussion of what constitutes participation, this approach restores context to the notion of cultural value" (Miles, 2016: 191). Important here is the paired attention to 'everyday', 'ordinary', 'mundane' goings-on, mirroring recent social science interests (e.g. Back, 2015; Hall, 2013), and more working class and marginalised cultures – or at least non-mainstream arts and cultural practice. In the fieldnotes that start this chapter there is a tension between an ordinary-looking club and a spectacular atmosphere – I will build on this shortly.

In its dogged broadness it is hard to know what isn't everyday participation. Boldly there is an effort to collapse two different uses of 'culture': culture as set of objects and activities, as is traditionally the remit of cultural policy, and the more cultural studies/anthropological notion of culture as shared meanings. Provocatively, cultural policy needs to do better at engaging with, and even supporting this broader notion of culture and cultural meaning – though this does lead to some strange places: "can we speak of supposedly mundane activities like shopping, taking the dog for a walk, or meeting up with friends as having cultural worth?" (UEP, 2020: np). Or darts? Though again, 'mundane' has particular meaning in this research – rather than a flat label, mundane I think is usefully understood as a contradiction.

As well as Bourdieu, Raymond Williams is a key reference:

"We use the word culture in these two senses: to mean a whole way of life – the common meanings; to mean arts and learning – the special processes of discovery and creative effort. Some writers reserve the word for one or other of these senses; I insist on both, and on the significance of their conjunction. The questions I ask about our culture are questions about our general and common purposes, yet also questions about deep personal meanings. Culture is ordinary, in every society and in every mind." (Williams, [1958] 1989: 4)

In his *Culture is Ordinary* essay Williams is scathing toward the kind of scholarship that finds a culturally bereft working class. 'Ordinary' here doesn't necessarily mean ordinary things, but that culture itself is ordinary, or unavoidable – *of course there is culture here, it is known and experienced ordinarily*. There is though the kind of collapsing of culture-s that everyday participation wants to affect. Attacking the uptightness of a Cambridge teashop, which is high-minded and cultural in all the wrong ways, Williams finds more meaningful and a more politically hopeful culture elsewhere:

"There is a distinct working-class way of life, which I for one value – not only because I was bred in it […] I think this way of life, with its emphases on neighbourhood, mutual obligation, and common betterment, as expressed in the great working-class political and industrial institutions, is in fact the best basis for any future English society […] So when Marxists say we live in a dying culture, and that the masses are ignorant, I have to ask them, as I asked them then, where on earth they have lived." (ibid: 8)

Culture and place are richly interwoven in Williams' descriptions. And in its expansiveness, even elusiveness, Williams finds culture in his home Welsh landscape and also in the music and literature he grew up with – these things entwined. Culture is also in the political effects of this: in 'emphases on neighbourhood, mutual obligation, and common betterment'. This entanglement of place, people, practice and politics is Williams' notion of 'structures of feeling', which I will return to later in this chapter. On the vital revisability of culture:

"We should accept, frankly, that if we extend our culture we shall change it: some that is

offered will be rejected, other parts will be radically criticised. And this is as it should be, for our arts, now, are in no condition to go down to eternity unchallenged […] To take our arts to new audiences is to be quite certain that in many respects those arts will be changed. I, for one, do not fear this […] if we understand cultural growth, we shall know that it is a continual offering for common acceptance; that we should not, therefore, try to determine in advance what should be offered, but clear the channels and let all the offerings be made, taking care to give the difficult full space, the original full time, so that it is a real growth, and not just a wider confirmation of old rules." (ibid: 16)

Williams' unprecious preferences inform the methodological challenge of everyday participation: "in the case of data instruments used in cultural policy, for example, the prioritisation of quantitative methods based on the sample survey […] [this] involves the reduction of the cultural field to a partial and specific set of measurable indicators that both represent and help to reinforce particular ways of 'seeing' participation" (Miles and Gibson, 2016: 152). Viva the 'old rules'. Not so reductively, to investigate everyday participation means: "[investigating] how participation is articulated by location and by the relations and boundaries within and between places and communities" (ibid: 153). So acknowledging the connection between culture (form) and culture (place and people) as Williams did.

The main contribution of everyday participation is insisting on the importance of place in cultural taste, and a willing curiosity. There is though a touch of the Culture Wars about it:

"In their preoccupation with 'innovation', 'creativity' and 'the aesthetic', contemporary cultural policymakers and urban planners have neglected to see how residual forms, such as the traditional Village Hall and its activities, may have something to offer in terms of their social organisation, and the way they sponsor an interaction of cultural and civic engagement." (Miles and Ebrey, 2017: 62)

Can't people in village halls be creative? Or working men's clubs be innovative? Are these things always class-ed? I would agree that there is a problem in where innovation is most often sought out, though. Putting this to work, Miles and Ebrey trace particular tensions in a fringe urban area and the activities and spaces, and really cultures, at play. There is a 'residual' culture done and sustained in

particular practices and spaces, of value to some, and more 'emergent' practices with their own social value. Miles and Ebrey read a broader politics of place in a changing area, and stress the significance of the value and character of different shared practices. They are left wondering: "how to act upon [these] findings in order to support, sustain and enable communities […] to 're-emerge' as providers of a richer, alternative model of participation to those currently legitimised by the state and shaped by the market" (ibid: 67). The implication is that this should have something to do with cultural policy.

Keeping a broad sense of cultural participation, Gilmore (2017) explores the ways that different groups make use of public parks. Mobilising an idea of the commons, parks are valuable to different groups for different reasons. Tensions manifest in the ways that behaviour is regulated – these regulations often at odds with the meanings of different practices. Lack of investment in austerity contexts ultimately limits the communal capabilities of these spaces. These are important and familiar arguments, like Amin's (2002) 'micro-publics' and continued sociological interest in parks as convivial spaces (e.g. Bates, 2018).

These examples betray, like charity shops (Edwards and Gibson, 2017), maybe the boundaries of everyday participation. Smoking is not everyday participation, nor is watching TV (*Strictly Come Dancing*?). The bend is to collective, offline and 'healthy', or at least not unhealthy, things. They are things damaged by austerity, and not marked as obviously high taste. There is something exciting and lively in seeking out meaningful practices that exist in some way outside a discipline. And a better understanding of Stoke as 'the Barcelona for darts', and darts having some cultural weight, might slow the seeming ease of the new 'left behind' commentary and its implied cultureless-ness. The idea of everyday participation seems to kick against an assumption that people ought to be engaging in (traditionally) cultural pursuits, and that this 'ought' is problematic. So for darts in Stoke, one might ask: what do Stoke dartists value, and why? How does darts in Stoke reflect or encourage a particular sense of place? And in doing so, asking all this without having decided that Stoke and Stokies are uncultured. These are good questions.

Everyday participation is maybe most distinct in the ways it diverges from its influences. As suggested, there is an effort to move on from Bourdieu's particular project, and embrace vulgar tastes and vulgar value. And Williams' unprecious preferences are pushed past books and singing and toward whatever else people like doing, and insistently seeing these things as cultural – in a 'whole way of life sense', and also the 'the special processes of discovery and creative effort'. I want to now make two connections that dovetail: first to Hesmondhalgh (2013) and a messy cultural experience outside a

proper cultural venue, and to Highmore's (2016a) challenge for cultural studies. These I hope productively poke and push at everyday participation, and clarify how it might be useful.

In *Why Music Matters* (2013) there is a lovely section where Hesmondhalgh describes a pub night out. He and his friends stumble on an Elvis impersonator. Despite some initial reluctance they enter into the fun of it:

> "By the time [Elvis] arrives on stage, enough booze has been consumed for him to be greeted with unforeseen adulation. His white jumpsuit is appropriately snug and he can sing well enough. Immediately people start to sing along. Talkers are shushed during the quieter songs. The speakers are turned up to the maximum, and the power of Elvis's Vegas repertory comes across through the pre-recorded backings played from the decks by Elvis's wife (who is called Sheila not Priscilla). As the evening goes on, the response becomes more raucous, and the interactions more surreal. A work colleague appears at the other side of the room, and, bizarrely, we serenade each other across the crowd to 'You've lost that loving feeling'. When the simple chords of 'Sweet Caroline' strike up, it's clear what's going to happen, and you can feel it in the room. Reaching out, touching you, [slight pause], touching me … The chorus elicits an ecstasy of collective singing, women and men, all at the top of our voices. There are smiles and laughter as some of the playground Mums performs their adoration of the overweight local superstar, but there's melancholy at times too. It seems that bitter-sweet lines from the Elvis repertory are invoking thoughts about relationships, past and present. Tell me that your sweet love hasn't died. There are drunken goodbyes, and all my friends and I stagger out of the pub, feeling we've had a great night, and that the working week has been obliterated by laughter and bittersweet emotion." (ibid: 103)

Hesmondhalgh's project is different to that of everyday participation. *Why Music Matters* argues forcefully for the ways that music is valuable not only in private contemplation, but also in its bodily effects and the various ways it turns us out to the world and others. Music matters not just because people like it, in a populist sense: music is an essential part of good living. Hesmondhalgh ranges across examples, generally staying away from high cultural experiences and favouring more shared, even pop-cultural ones.

But his night out has many of the markers of everyday participation: it isn't high culture, it is collective and offline, and it happens in a pub rather than a (traditional, in one sense) cultural venue. There is also a messiness to it. No one is sitting down quietly taking in the performance – there is joy is in the back and forth, and a certain unruliness (or different-ruliness). Elvis sings 'well enough', but the collective experience described is much more than well enough. Pub culture soaks through the description, such that it doesn't make much sense outside its setting. Any idea of the value of the gig is in the people and the place (and the pints), as well as the performance. So productively, in seeking out different kinds of cultural experiences, everyday participation might help collect and better understand nights out like these, in which the character of a not-quite cultural space bleeds through the cultural thing – in this case music. Even if music is a very studied cultural form, everyday participation might help capture the messiness not found sitting still in the stalls – and get the Elvis impersonator some Arts Council money. And this, I would argue, better captures the spirit of Williams' claim that culture is ordinary, who writes in *The Long Revolution* ([1961] 1965) that:

"The solution is not to pull art down to the level of other social activity as this is habitually conceived. The emphasis that matters is that there are, essentially, no 'ordinary' activities, if by 'ordinary' we mean the absence of creative interpretation and effort. Art is ratified, in the end, by the fact of creativity in all our living." (ibid: 54)

The other thing I want to take from Hesmondhalgh's night out is its richness and specificity –where the messiness is found. At the end of a chapter on experience, Highmore I think hits the potentials and pitfalls of something like everyday participation:

"I think that the world of cultural studies is generally under-attentive to aesthetic description, perhaps it is too associated with a world of leisured interest rather than urgent enquiry. But cultural studies to my mind at least needs to learn aesthetic description and learn to spend time at the level of describing the cultural phenomena it is attentive to. Otherwise the world of ordinary sensual culture – the world of food, of bodies, of the senses – will end up as simply carriers of interpretations that have already been decreed in advance by the sort of 'culture-at-a-distance' accounts that are offered by the large-scale theory of Foucault, Bourdieu and others – who, it must be said, spent their time trying to describe a world that

they are uncovering, before they mapped out their interpretative schemas." (Highmore, 2016a: 116)

Does the impulse of everyday participation not also (maybe) undermine its usefulness as a collective term? *Not opera*, though a powerful rallying cry, does not offer much in terms of understanding, or necessarily '[restore] context to the notion of cultural value' (Miles, 2016: 191). And where it does, it might continue an 'at-a-distance' account: darts and Elvis, or parks and village halls, defined against their relation to a cultural hierarchy, but still understood by that hierarchy. Highmore (2016b) makes this argument elsewhere that our individual and collective preferences, or tastes, shouldn't only be understood through a structural-hierarchal account, suggesting instead: "it is useful to connect taste to experiential meanings, ones that aren't hemmed in by the need to evaluate taste in terms of whether it is considered good or bad, elite or popular, polite or uncouth, and so on. (This doesn't mean abandoning evaluative judgements, it means opening up the judgement of taste to a much larger range of evaluations that don't stand or fall on a single value.)" (ibid: 59) – I build on this argument throughout the chapter. Hesmondhalgh is wonderfully not at-a-distance, and so is able to do justice to *not opera* by, I would argue, making Elvis more than *not opera*. A range of evaluations can then follow.

'The Barcelona for darts' puts wood on the fire of everyday participation, but later in the *Oatcakes* documentary Phil Taylor also says of darts in Stoke: "there's nothing else to do, what we gonna do- go Waterworld every week?" (The 7th Town, 2014: np). This is said with a smile, but like his Barcelona comparison I think it is worth taking seriously. Whilst championing a particular scene, can we also acknowledge that it emerges alongside of a lack of other options? This is a necessary question in somewhere like Stoke – though not enjoying writing 'somewhere like Stoke': Stoke isn't like anywhere. And, cooling any populist positivity, Hesmondhalgh's (2013) night out didn't end there:

> "Unwittingly, I brush against a man's drink as I'm leaving, and he follows me out to the front of the pub, demanding an apology for his spilt beer. Given his state and size, I'm only too happy to provide one. The power of Elvis' music, it seems, has brought strangers and acquaintances together, and with formidable intensity. But my pursuer has reminded me

unpleasantly that there are those who feel excluded from such collective pleasures." (ibid: 103-104)

What if there is nothing else to do and *what if examples of everyday participation actively exclude certain groups* are important questions, if trying to make a value argument. This demands opening up everyday participation to other kinds of value claims, and I think benefits its open-ended-ness. So going forward, in this chapter I will make links to ideas of social infrastructure (Klinenberg, 2018; Latham and Layton, 2019), care and caring infrastructure (The Care Collective, 2020), and conviviality (Gilroy, 2004; 2006; Jackson, 2018; 2020). Suggesting that something like darts is valuable is not particularly new – what is new is suggesting that cultural policy should support it.

The charge of everyday participation is an interesting one for a project like CUSP: if arts and culture are indeed a part of 'sustainable prosperity', what kind of arts and culture are being considered, and what assumptions are being made about them? And what isn't being considered? There is though a lingering question around the implication of a totalising *culture is what you make it* attitude, and implying Hesmondhalgh is all the while an everyday participation researcher would be very dishonest. Hesmondhalgh is making a defence of music against precisely the kind of argument everyday participation attempts. More than just cultural value, Hesmondhalgh works to locate the value of music specifically in a variety of settings and moments. Thus Hesmondhalgh makes some qualified objective claims about the value of music: not what music always does, but what music can do. Put crudely, everyday participation and *Why Music Matters* (2013) represent opposite attitudes to cultural value: subjective (but not totally: offline and collective, not *Strictly*) and more objective (but not totally: can be good, can also not).

Skipping ahead in the chapter, John, the darts veteran in the opening fieldnotes, compared his experiences of playing darts with going to football matches. Darts he said was uniquely sociable – watching a football match you might chat to those around you or the friends you have come with, but not necessarily get to know anyone else. With darts it was always a different pub and a different team every week. John used to spend more of his time and money going to watch football, but had chosen instead to focus on darts. From this one couldn't, or at least shouldn't, make an argument about whether darts is better or worse than football – football of course has its advocates. But one might say that darts, or at least the abundant way darts is done in Stoke, facilitates a kind of sociability that is important to those who play: darts is *not opera*, and it is also not football. Bourdieu inserts some sociology into arguments around taste and preference, but this isn't the only sociology of cultural

taste (Hennion, 2001). Unlike Hesmondhalgh I am not able to write *Why Darts Matters* as I haven't the ranging examples, but I do want to argue that darts in Stoke matters not just because John and others liked it. The links to other literature help here, as well as returning to Williams' sense of cultural-political 'emphases' – so straddling the gap between something more than subjective, but not quite objective on darts.

An unwillingness to see people as uncultured, and taking leisurely pursuits seriously makes everyday participation a compelling argument. Particularly compelling is the idea that taste has a sense of place – I will try and elaborate on this in this chapter. Everyday participation refashions Boudieu's 'complete picture' (Highmore, 2016b: 536), but as this chapter builds I will argue this complete picture is a limited one – though very attractive in many ways. Williams' want for 'the difficult full space, the original full time' for culture to flourish is instructive in this research – and particularly with Lynda's line dancing classes, the value and meanings of which changed given the full space and time.

4.2 Everyday?

Adapted fieldnotes:

I am meeting Ian White on a Monday, a week after he has beaten Michael Van Gerwen in a tournament. Van Gerwen is the top-ranked men's darts player in the world (note: currently 3rd). *I arrive early to find a quiet corner for the interview – we have decided to meet at his local working men's club. Ian plays for the club's darts team, and given there is a league game on tonight this means he can do the interview and still play if they need him.*

I get a drink and explain to the bar staff who I am meeting. 'Oh yeah Ian, we know him well'. I ask if I can commandeer the snug just off from the main bar.

Ian breezes in just after 7pm and says his hellos to the darts players, then hellos to everyone else in the club. At one time Ian, Phil Taylor (16-time world champion), Adrian Lewis (2-time world champion) and Andy Hamilton (former 5th ranked player in the world) all played for the same darts team in Stoke. He orders a coke.

We sit down and I explain my research, and ask if he has any good Stoke darts stories. He does:

One night I played in the super-league team that I'm in now, and Andy Hamilton had moved and had gone into another one [team], and at the time he was quite high up in the [world] rankings and so was I, and we ended up playing each other on a local league night- we played in one of the pubs in Stoke, and the whole pub just stopped, stopped to watch us. We played and I'm glad I won 2-1 but erm, and everyone just watched it. If you look at it, like me and Andy playing each other is like playing at the Ally Pally [Alexandra Palace] and people are watching it in the local league, local pub- it just all stopped, they all watched us and at the end they all cheered and everything- it was just a local game [laughs].

Every year thousands of people go to Alexandra Palace to watch the best players compete for the world title prize – now £500,000 for the winner. In Stoke you can see the world's best in the local leagues – in a pub not a palace. Still smiling at Ian and Andy's game, I ask why he thinks darts is popular in Stoke:

I think with [Eric] Bristow and [Phil] Taylor putting it on the map, that was well before my time, but them putting it on the map all the young lads want to play darts now and the pubs in Stoke still have the dartboards, a lot of other towns have gone to food pubs and you do lose your dart board and lose your pool teams, but down in Stoke you've still got your pool, got your darts, your crib, your skittles which is an old game- we've got a league for that, y'know. So they do keep the standard- the old pub games in Stoke erm, but yeah with Bristow and Taylor putting it on the map I don't think the kids want to go to school, I think they just want to play darts.

Ian asks me what I think, and I repeat a joke Tony made: 'we have pubs in Stoke, we don't have wine bars. There aren't dart boards in wine bars!' From there the interview stops being very academic. I ask Ian what it is like playing on stage in front of thousands of people and how he manages the nerves. We also talk about line dancing.

While putting my recorder away I mention that I have set up a small darts league in Leeds. Ian is interested, and suggests he pops along for a game if he is nearby. The plan: we won't tell the others he is coming, I'd just say that I have invited a friend along, and then he'd turn up and act like it wasn't a big deal. I am enthusiastic but warn that we aren't that good. 'That's no problem!' In the meantime Ian offers to give me some signed posters for the players. 'Of course!' 'Great, I'll come along to The Brown Bear tomorrow and drop them off'. It is a wonderful and surreal end to a wonderfully surreal interview.

The next day I am not sure he will turn up. Maybe he was just being polite to an over-excited researcher. I voice my doubts to the darts team who all soundly reject them. 'No, if Ian says he'll do something he'll do it'. 'Ian is great, he'll be here'.

Sure enough 20 minutes later Ian walks in with a few signed posters. I am (again) slightly star-struck, but no one else seems to be. 'Told you he'd turn up'. 'Mark thought you might have forgot!' Ian gives me the posters and says he is sorry he has to rush away – he has a game in the same league we are playing in, though a few divisions up. Amazed by the seeming everydayness of it I thank him again for the interview and for the posters, then he walks out and everyone goes back to playing.

"The everyday offers itself up as a problem, a contradiction, a paradox: both ordinary and extraordinary, self-evident and opaque, known and unknown, obvious and enigmatic."
(Highmore, 2002a: 16)

Here I want to clarify quickly what I mean by 'everyday' in this research, via *Seinfeld* and Ben Highmore and my brief encounter with Ian White. Darts and line dancing I think can be usefully described as everyday, so as to make clearer certain contradictions. Darts and dancing are not like plunging morning coffee or queuing at self-service checkouts – though the once easy rhythm of supermarket etiquette has changed during the pandemic to a ~~new normal~~ new everyday. But it is significant that Ian popping into The Brown Bear, or dancers grieving at the side of Lynda's classes was expected – and at least a bit everyday. Even if these things aren't unimportant. These are the kind of paradoxes 'everyday' can usefully hold together.

In the *Seinfeld* episode 'The Pitch' (Seinfeld, 1992), George and Jerry dream up an idea for a TV show based on their day-to-day experiences. Waiting for a table at a restaurant? That's an episode. What makes a condiment a condiment? There's the dialogue. 'Everybody's doing something, we'll do nothing'. Jerry and George have a meeting with TV executives to discuss their idea. George is unwavering in his commitment, but Jerry is keen to explain and appease. They have this exchange:

George: The show is about…nothing!

Jerry: Well, it's not about nothing

George: No, it's about nothing

Jerry: Well, maybe in philosophy, but even nothing is something

'Nothing is something' I think expresses an attitude to the everyday, or attitudes – there are two ways of reading 'nothing is something'. The first, as matches the *not opera* sensibilities of everyday participation, is that everything is something: everything is of substance. Darts is not 'nothing' per a class-ed attitude toward culture. Darts is 'something' like the foyer of a Chinese restaurant is in *Seinfeld* – substance enough to set an episode in one (the sit- in sit-com needn't be big and grand). There is though another way of reading Jerry's 'nothing is something': that the apparent nothingness of 'the everyday' is something.

It was something for me when Ian White, a top-10 men's darts player in the world, walked into a working men's club in Stoke. But it was relatively nothing for everyone else. Having four professional darts players playing for one pub team is extraordinary, but there is something about darts in Stoke that makes it more ordinary, if not quite everyday. This paradox is essential to understanding Ian and Andy's darts game: 'the whole pub just stopped' and 'it was just a local game'. It is extraordinary that it was (almost) ordinary. And then to John, who said only half-jokingly that he wouldn't know anyone if it wasn't for darts, the experience and value of not being isolated is anything but ordinary – it is everything. These are the kind of contradictions that drive the humour in *Seinfeld* – and the show's frustrated obsessing with habits in polite society that, when inspected, often aren't that polite. Like *Seinfeld*, I am interested in these contradictions, and what these contradictions suggest.

Asked to define the everyday, Highmore (2018) gives a useful answer and example:

> "I always think that, if you were looking for a definition, if you were looking for a starting point, you would not look towards the world and say that some phenomena are included, and some are not included. It would be about your perspective. So, I would prefer to think about everyday life as a perspective on the world rather than a category of things that exist in the world. For instance, you could have given birth, which is not an everyday experience and, for lots of us, it includes the medical profession […] Yet, it both is and is not part of the everyday. Certainly, for people who work in the maternity hospital, it really is a routine, normal thing, but it is still life and giving birth, you are still having a child and you think: 'Oh, my god, this is what they do all the time, this cannot be special to them in the way that it is special to me'. And yet, it both is and is not." (ibid: 114)

'It both is and is not' is, making an odd birthing-darts connection, a lot like Ian and Andy's game – and a lot like Jerry's defence of his would-be show. And, as is instructive for everyday participation, something comes with not marking activities or spaces as everyday and not. Surely the point is that opera is at least more everyday and culturally legible to some, and darts more everyday and legible for others. There is an imbalance in cultural heft, but keeping an unsettled *is and isn't* everyday is productive in understanding complications and contradictions – between the front and the back hall of the working men's club, for instance.

Highmore stresses complexity when introducing and reviewing a variety of academic literature concerned with everyday life: "everyday life is a vague and problematic phrase. Any assumption that is simply 'out there', as a palpable reality to be gathered up and described, should face an immediate question: whose everyday life" (Highmore, 2002b: 1). Staking claim to a real and shared everyday is often an act of, knowing or not, exclusion – Nick Clegg coining 'alarm clock Britain' is an example of this, where the call to shared life and ritual worked to further the *benefits lifestyle* narrative that was gaining political clout: if an alarm wasn't waking you up for work, then you didn't count. So rather than definition, Highmore gathers a variety of perspectives and intellectual projects concerned in some way with everyday life, that taken together give some sense of everyday perspectives: Goffman's micro-sociology makes visible particular spatial and temporal constraints in our adherence (and not) to expectations of etiquette; De Certeau finds small moments of resistance and defiance

against the creep of capitalism; and Lefebvre demonstrates the scope and scale of alienation and commodification while keeping hope of something else. *The everyday* in each of these is the thing not observed that demands attention – though the energy and direction of this attention is different. And as Blanchot ([1959] 1987) and Schor (1992) highlight, the historical patterns of this attention-grabbing has bolstered more masculinised flâneur-like concerns at home in the streets, but not at home in the home itself.

Collecting these perspectives, Highmore suggests:

> "Everyday life invites a kind of theorising that throws our most cherished *theoretical* values and practices into crisis. For instance, theorists often promote the values of 'rigorous' thought, 'systemic' elaboration and 'structured' argument: but what if rigour, system and structure were antithetical and deadening to aspects of everyday life? What if 'theory' was to be found elsewhere, in the pages of a novel, in a suggestive passage of description in an autobiography, or in the street games of children? What if theory (the kind that is designated as such) was beneficial for attending to the everyday, not via its systematic interrogations, but through its poetics, its ability to render the familiar strange?" (2002b: 3, emphasis in original)

The Brecht-like want 'to render the familiar strange', and to broadly *think out* from novels and games (and darts) rather than *think in*, similarly veers away from the 'culture-at-a-distance' theory that might not fully account for cultural taste (Highmore, 2016a; 2016b). This is different to everyday participation – the 'everyday' in everyday participation being a placeholder for 'other', and this other a commitment to not affirm cultural-structural hierarchy. But at least in this research, it is useful for 'everyday' to hold together the problem/contradiction/paradox of Ian and Andy's game, and the front and back halls of the working men's club in the opening fieldnotes, and John saying offhandedly that if it weren't for darts he wouldn't know anyone. For John isolation was everyday, and darts a brilliant break from that – it was and wasn't everyday.

4.3 Darts in Stoke

The middle of this chapter is split in two: first addressing Stoke, then *Barcelona*. This first section draws on interviews to think through the ways darts and Stoke were talked about together, and what

this suggests about darts and about Stoke. Here I introduce Antoine Hennion (2001; 2021) and Highmore's (2016b) thinking on taste in more detail. The second header is an effort to collect my evenings spent playing in the league, and to describe *Barcelona* as affects – or 'cultural feelings' (Highmore, 2017). What was Barcelona-like at the right pub on the right night is gestured to in these interviews, though often falling into 'can't put into words'-ing.

Tim had several good Stoke darts stories. He saw Adrian Lewis walk into a pub and throw back-to-back nine-darters with borrowed darts – this equivalent to a 147 in snooker or a golfing hole-in-one. Tim had been running the Collerton Darts League for two years and had been playing in it for 15. Having competed in tournaments around the UK, Tim insisted that Stoke-on-Trent was the home of darts:

> "You know, it's just getting bigger and better in Stoke-on-Trent … I mean you can play every single night of the week. You can go in a pub and there'll be a dart board or two dart boards, if you go in certain pubs there'll be eight or nine dart boards, and there'll always be someone practising or someone having a chuck, and you know you can go up and have a chuck- 'Yeah yeah we can have a few chucks'. That's what I think I love about it.
>
> It's the people who are in the league who make the league, the teams make the league, it's publicans always having a laugh and a joke and a bit of banter. While darts games are going on there's a lot of respect there for the other player. Whether you in or lose, you're always out for a night out, a few beers, so you know it's all good.
>
> I think it's because it's such a close community, and we'll always look out for each other and always there for each other, if the neighbours get stuck we help the neighbour out, and visa versa. And it's the same with the darts."

As well as all the homegrown professionals, the Stoke leagues attracted international talent. Tim knew professionals from Australia, New Zealand and Canada who played or wanted to play in the Collerton league. Tim said it was the high standard, and the sheer number of games and leagues in Stoke that was so attractive. It wasn't managed like a professionals league, though:

> "It's getting the drinks in, having a laugh and a joke … it's dead weird to explain because as

soon as you walk in the pub you know there's going to be laugher. And many times I've walked in a pub, and before I've even walked in the pub I'm like *oh my god* I'm going to have jaw ache tonight from laughing, and get some tissues to wipe my eyes cus I'm going to be crying with laughter. It's the banter that you feed off each other, and it's where we support [the] local team, or another football team you give em bant- give em grief[8], it's just pure banter. You'd have to experience it to actually understand, you can't really put it in words, I'd say. It's just a great experience. And every pub you go in, and everyone you meet is a different character, you know what I mean. It's … it's crazy mate it's crazy. But it's so lovable."

The league was swelling from 45 to 50 teams across 4 divisions. This success was down to the players, and more broadly a sense of community:

"I think what it is is that, because, we're all there for each other, and it brings us a lot closer. It's like for me to live in me house and Joe Bloggs up the street wanting something, it's just that kind of close-knit community, where it's just everybody else looks out [for each other] … it's great, I wouldn't like to do the league anywhere else. Yeah, because if you've got a problem, you might have Joe Bloggs 10 miles away come up and give you a hand, know what I mean? It's all through darts, you get to know that many people. It's not just like the darts- you look at the likes of the plumbing side, brickie, or a plasterer or an electrician. 'Oh I know he plays darts, I'll ring him, I'd rather give him the money rather than someone else'.

Everyone wants to play in the Stoke leagues. It's better leagues, simple as [...] I love darts myself, when everything is going right I always like to look around and think *yeah*, everyone's smiling everyone's happy, and it's great to see the expression on other people's faces."

Bell and Jayne's book *Small Cities* (2006) ends by asking: "might it be possible to reconceive staying small as something other than stagnation or lack of ambition?" (ibid: 247). And in darts they have maybe an answer. Though the league was expanding and the scene internationally recognised, the basic framework of the league was the same – ran out of pubs, managed by monthly meetings with the captains, and still trading on familiarity and closeness. It was 'staying small' and not at all

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[8] For context, Stoke-on-Trent is home to two prominent football teams: Stoke City and Port Vale.

stagnating.

Tony and his dad used to play together in the Collerton league. Tony sr. took up darts after emigrating from Italy to work in the pits around Stoke. Darts fitted around his shift work, and he introduced Tony to the game at home – throwing into the living room from the hallway. When Tony was old enough he joined his dad's team and has played in leagues ever since. Like Tim, Tony described a scene thriving on Stokie social capital:

> "If you- the pot banks and the pits have long gone, but the people are still the same, still friendly people, and I've travelled around working different places and I can vouch for that, and I- and even when people do come to Stoke they say they're dead friendly, know what I mean. And I think we are. So that's part of this area which has always been like that, cos mainly Stoke has always been a poorly paid area. Pot banks didn't get paid much, pits got paid a little bit but er, but if you compared the wages to like other areas, North or South, Stoke was kept quite lowly paid. I mean I were in the foundry, and the foundry money has never been good, but it's dirty and it's a hard job, so er another thing about getting out after a hard days work is it's nice to get out and have a pint. But certainly, when I've played in other areas, Stoke is a better class of player."

Tony described himself as a 'casual' player but still practised two hours a day. His work had a dart board up, and he arrived early and stayed late playing every day – and then played competitively most nights of the week. He also fashioned his own darts – Tony liked to play with especially short and light darts that were out of style and not manufactured anymore. Everything from the grip to the weight was just to his liking, and seemingly no one else's. All this was reasonably considered 'casual'.

In his youth Tony worked at Jollees Cabaret Club when they hosted the World Professional Darts Championship. He remembers watching Jocky Wilson and John Lowe through the clouds of smoke, and revelling in the special atmosphere. Tony's darts heydays were behind him though, and while he used to take a more competitive approach, he had become much more laidback:

> "I have no ambitions to go around winning, playing loads and loads of competitions or anything, I just see it as a social activity and erm, meeting people you know, which

unfortunately nowadays there isn't many social things going on. You're on these [phones] aren't you, talking to each other on it. I've seen em, young'uns on there ordering drinks on phones, you don't even have to go to the bar anymore, I hate it. Conversations just- they [staff] walk round with 'Order Online' on the back of their shirt. Na, the old-fashioned way, queue up at the bar and get chatting to people."

And as well as meeting people and avoiding the creep of the post-modern pub, Tony played darts for the food: "I know you've noticed, when I go [to play darts] I go for the food as well, free snacking [laughs]. You pay a pound and you get free food, so helps with the weekly food bill. And especially doing four nights a week, I never used to have any tea, just go straight out to the pub so- if you think about it saving on the food bill as well!" Adam, The Brown Bear's landlord and sixth man on the team, was known around the league for his excellent cooking – teams looked forward to playing at The Brown Bear for this reason. So as well as the company, the promise of a good meal stopped Tony looking around for another team.

John was the most experienced player at The Brown Bear. He used to play for the same team as John Part – the two-time world champion who moved from Canada to play in the Stoke leagues. John saw Phil Taylor grow from pub player to world champion. By combination of age and too many broken fingers John didn't play as much as he used to, but always turned up regardless. "Why it's so good in Stoke? I don't know, I mean Manchester you can't play darts, when I've been I haven't seen any darts". He went on:

"It is a working man's game, you don't get posh knobs bloody playing darts, y'know what I mean? The *la-di-da* types, none of them playing darts […] You'd have to ask them … ask them in London [laughs]. You don't get … because you can walk in a pub in any dress, you don't see anybody playing darts in ties, you come and play in working stuff and the working clothes, come straight from work- Tony comes straight from work. Some of the other lads come straight from work and play darts. Why is that? Because they enjoy it. And you haven't got to get dressed up or, everybody is equal basically, there's no- … other than the 'I'm better than you' y'know what I mean, but everybody's basically equal, and everybody's the same.

It's funny, you walk in a pub and people go 'Want a bit of darts', 'We'll have a bit of darts'. It's

the best way to meet people … not like football. You go football match with your mates … say me and you go football match, there's just me and you, you don't interact with anybody else, but when you play darts there's 12 players, 15 players or whatever, you interact with everybody who comes in the pub to play you so that's … well you know me and every pub I go I know people, and that's what darts is about. Everywhere you go you know somebody. If I didn't play darts then I wouldn't meet anybody. All's I know is the people in the pub, y'know. So it's a good way of making friends."

Here John gives two different accounts of taste. First is Bourdieu-like in highlighting darts as not-*la-di-da* versus more *la-di-da* pursuits – and indeed places: London and Manchester versus Stoke. Darts is valuable because it doesn't exclude people – though 'you can walk in a pub in any dress' is immediately contradicted by 'you don't see anybody playing darts in ties', and before that 'you don't get posh knobs bloody playing darts'. Darts' cultural-symbolic capital is clear, and clearly part of John's love for it.

He also though expresses a different sense of taste and preference – one more linked to 'experiential meanings' (Highmore, 2016b). Highmore's argument builds on Hennion's (2001), who similarly argues for a more ranging approach to taste: "which amounts to more than the actualizations [sic] of a taste 'already there', for they are redefined during the action, with a result that is partly uncertain" (ibid: 1). Researching with amateur music enthusiasts, Hennion finds: "rich and inventive practice[s] that simultaneously [recompose] music and its practitioners in situ, according to the needs and with various mediums, resources, devices and ceremonials available" (ibid: 3). So a taste for this or that is less an endpoint than an opportunity for invention: "music itself is not the end result of a passion of music, but a means, like an orchestra, voice, instrumental technique and the stage, of reaching certain states" (ibid: 9). The same is true of darts, but the means are the leagues and the boards and the pubs. Hennion's focus is as much on tasting as cultural taste: here the recognition that each time we play darts or go line dancing, or even go to the opera, this involves a variety of routines and settings, and importantly this tasting is not just 'mechanical confirmation' (Hennion, 2021) – it is enriching and transformative in some way.

Using Hennion's language, darts, rather than football, was a better means for John of 'reaching certain states' of sociability. Tim similarly described a dart board as an invitation – like a basketball hoop in a park. John sets up different arguments around taste and place: Stoke is not *la-di-da* and

neither is darts, so there is natural bonhomie in *vulgar* place and practice. But in a place where darts is thriving, and where there is always 12 or 15 people to meet every night of the week, taste and place here reflect the inventiveness of Stoke darts in its abundance – taste and place is not just mechanical, but lively. John put it simply: "you go in some pubs and nobody talks to you, but with darts everybody talks to you". This isn't true everywhere. Hennion concludes the paper suggesting that: "far from autotomizing [sic] an art which is divorced from its former functional qualities, these emotional procedures destroy the clear boundary between what falls within the scope of music and what does not, in favour of a heterogeneous body of practices for attaining a state of emotional intensity" (2001: 18-19). The 'emotional intensity' John describes is a social one, like Tim's description of 'feeding off each other'. The destruction of boundaries Hennion suggests is very different to the argument for everyday participation, that is built on a boundary. This of course does not mean class is unimportant – John is expressing an idea of social capital and neighbourliness where class is clearly legible. But the point is that John's taste for darts cannot be explained by this alone: other kinds of experiences are important, and class is not a flat thing.

Nick only started playing for The Brown Bear the year before, but had played darts since he was a kid – darts tournaments were a regular feature of family get-togethers. He described a funny encounter with Phil Taylor:

> "I was probably 21/22, in The Sager Makers in Burslem, playing darts with a few of me mates, Phil Taylor came in and I played Phil Taylor for best of three for a pint, and he beat me 2-1. And we played again in best of three at pool, and I beat him and he bought me a pint back! […] You think of darts and you automatically assume Stoke-on-Trent.
>
> You've had a shitty week at work there's nothing better than walking into your local, regardless if you're playing darts or not, and having a crack on with the lads that are in there, cos you just forget about what a shit week you've had."

In Nick's mind darts was uniquely sociable, and uniquely technique-less:

> "That's the one thing that stands out to me about darts more than anything else, is it doesn't

matter how you hold or how you throw your dart, nobody judges you who plays. Anybody who plays or watches darts does not judge how you throw, does not judge how you stand […] Tony is weird with his throw. John, I don't know if it was cos of his hand- how his hand is, but he had a strange way of holding his darts. One of my mates' Dad, he'd hold his by the point [of the dart], he didn't miss! Until he got his arthritis he was fucking shit hot."

Nick played every week, and his wife Annie came along as well. Annie enjoyed a friendly game after the league matches had finished, but said she was too nervous to play for the team. Belonging and being a part of the group though was important to her – and it wasn't just a 'crack on with the lads':

"Thing is, it's not the lads- most of the women will join in as well y'know, and they'll give the lads as much grief as what the lads give the girls … The girls- there's always been this girls *there*, boys *there* even when you grow up, women that side men that side, and I'm one of these that's like 'Why?' […] I can throw a dart, I can play pool, I can play snooker- not very good at kicking a ball but can't do everything [laughs]. But yeah I'll pretty much join in with everything, I love being involved, I hate sitting on the sidelines and watching everybody there […] There is the whole gathering together, you can walk to the pub together that you need to play at, or if you're staying at [The Brown Bear] you're all there, then the next lot come."

The Brown Bear had two men's teams and three women's – though women also played for the men's teams. The captains of the tongue-in-cheek 'housewives league' similarly spoke about the fun of seeing different pubs and meeting different people: "it's a night out, more of a social gathering really. Lots of arguments [laughs]. Plenty of banter, lots of drink, lots of swearing". The captains described these games as less competitive than the men's – this owing something to the men being able to get away and practice more, and also owing something to the arguments and bantering and drinking and swearing. These games were an opportunity for a midweek night-out – typically a male privilege orbiting around different games and hobbies. 'They can do the cooking, we can do the drinking, see how they get on!'

These interviews extend the questions around everyday participation. While John and others situate darts symbolically against posher pastimes, there are also a 'range of evaluations' like Highmore hopes for. The 'inventiveness' Hennion describes is evident especially in Annie's and the female captains' comments, where darts was a way into exclusive and excluding spaces and revelries. There is clearly a sense that darts excellence is everyday in Stoke – in having eight or nine boards in a pub, and the different stories of professional players in familiar settings. These anecdotes were delivered with less *you wouldn't believe this* than *of course you will believe this* – this equally speaking to an idea of smallness.

Before organising these sentiments, I want to first try and give a sense of *Barcelona* – while Tim is maybe right that 'you'd probably have to experience it to actually understand, you can't really put it in words', it can be unpacked a little with some words. I am not leaving these interviews behind, just introducing a different frame to help flesh them out.

4.4 Darts in *Barcelona*

In *Cultural Feelings* (2017) Highmore offers a way of avoiding 'culture-at-a-distance'. 'Cultural feelings' is an elaboration on Raymond Williams' 'structures of feeling': "cultural feelings are neither internal, subjective states of affairs, nor are they ethereal atmospheres that exist outside of history […] [cultural feelings] are embodied and embedded in practices and habits, in routines and procedures that often have both a linguistic and material support" (ibid: 37-38). Highmore argues that Williams' admittedly slippery 'structures of feeling' is still valuable: "always [moving] towards the pulsing, populated world" (ibid: 30). What Highmore does is help with some of the slipperiness of structures of feeling, by drawing on Heidegger and also recent affect writing, and clarifying a means of approaching cultural feelings while still reaching for the 'pulsing, populated world': considering the material, labour-ed, historical and social elements that support and sustain a given mood or shared experience or cultural feeling – however big or small. This brings together both of Williams' definitions of culture, and any emergent cultural-political 'emphases' in what a mood or social atmosphere gives rise to – this a similar bend to recent affect writing, particularly in cultural geography, though managing to stay lively and accessible. In *Cultural Feelings* Highmore describes art and music and TV shows that say something about the contexts from which they emerge, whilst also shaping that context – these things finding meaning in that moment, and now offering a cultural-historical insight into, for instance, rising and falling currents of hope and cynicism in Thatcherite

Britain.

My ambitions are much lesser, as I am trying to describe something much more discrete, but Highmore's framing is still greatly helpful in bringing out the *hard to say* bits of my fieldwork. And while this quick introduction does little to suggest the slipperiness is overcome, it is only really overcome when put to work. By not just naming *Barcelona*, and rather exploring what made evenings of darts Barcelona-like, this immediately shifts focus onto the small matter of dart board maintenance.

4.4.1 *Barcelona* was material

Midway through the year Adam managed to find space for a third dart board. The Brown Bear was quite a small pub so logistically this was impressive. The main board was opposite the bar, and was positioned such that players wouldn't be interrupted by anyone wanting to squeeze by to get to a table. Two spotlights lit up the playing area, and an extra ring of lights was brought out on league nights. The second board was in the corner behind the main one, and Adam found space for the third next to the pool table. Adam made sure to rotate the boards so the 20-beds wouldn't wear thin, and the boards themselves were replaced regularly. Adam had been trying to encourage darts at the pub for the last few years and his efforts had started to bear fruit – the darts players felt looked after, and this kept the pub busy during the week.

Highmore's (2017) first point of clarification for cultural feelings is that they are material – or materially supported. Various 'sensorial supports' put us in the mood for certain things at certain times. Sounds and scenes 'orchestrate attention' in particular ways, that don't determine experience but certainly shape it. There is also a cultural 'literacy' in different kinds of responses to these cues – and illiteracy if ignored. Highmore uses the example of a cinema, and really the pre-cinema, to explore and illustrate:

> "Sitting there [in the auditorium] I would get the measure of the experience of those around me – a sense of the theatricality of the presentation. Listening to my much-loved Nina Simone from down there was awful: it just sounded like wine-bar good-taste. But it was amazingly ignorable. What wasn't ignorable and worked like some sort hallucinatory charm was the dimming of lighting. Dimming the lights was like turning the volume down on the audience.

You could see them adjust themselves in their seats; reorient themselves in relation to their companions, their seating and the screen. The dimming, recalibrated space, made neighbours recede and intensified the pull of the screen. People hunkered down; we were in for the long haul." (ibid: 6)

Figure 5: *The main board at The Brown Bear*

So "mood is hardly the result of happenstance" (ibid: 8). A dart board is part of the architecture of the (typically) British pub, this apparent in the way they are often edge-of-frame in so many pub scenes on screen – or any generically masculine space. These things combine in *The Streets* 'Don't Mug Yourself' music video (The Streets, [2002] 2019), as Mike Skinner everyman-s in lyrics and imagery from caff to pub in a Fred Perry polo. This dart board makes a kind of sense, while not drawing any special attention in a palette of muted modern British-ness. But his dart board doesn't look so well looked after or properly lit, nor placed to benefit the players rather than the punters. It is just there, like so many are.

On league nights, when the home players arrived at 7pm the extra lights were already up and the area clear. The catch up/warm up was soundtracked by a soft clash of turned-low Sky Sports News and whatever was on the jukebox, but as the games started the jukebox and screens were put on mute. This had an effect on the players, like dimming lights in the cinema, and an effect on the pub. For the next two or three hours the sounds that animated the room were those of the darts games,

and when it was ok to get up for a cigarette was at least in part dictated by whether a player was on an important double.

Figure 6: *Mike Skinner everyman-ing* (The Streets, [2002] 2019)

This is all especially true of the tournament in the opening fieldnotes – the five boards were material, and the horseshoe of seats and tables centred attention on the players. And while this is a more of a heightened *Barcelona* setting, the point is that the Stoke-darts connection is more than happy happenstance. This gives context to John's observation that 'you go in some pubs and nobody talks to you, but with darts everybody talks to you', and Tim saying that in Stoke there's always someone new to play darts with – this built on a foundation of good lighting, careful staging, and a thick 20-bed.

4.4.2 *Barcelona* was work

"The labour of many people is often aimed at maintaining cultural feelings; we are always entangled in a world of feeling. But just as people labour to produce moods and atmospheres, so too do animate and inanimate objects. Indeed, it is usually the synchronising of humans and machines, bodies and tools, people and techniques that produce achievable and sustainable mood-worlds." (Highmore, 2017: 10)

Adam regularly changing and rotating the boards was work, as was the food he put on after. The food was important for Tony's wallet, and also anchored an important bit of any home game. While the matches were going on there generally wasn't much chatter between the teams – the players usually too engrossed. There was often a feel of theatrical competitiveness: us against them, and always backing your teammates. But at 9:30pm when the games finished Adam would serve food and things shifted. Missed doubles were cursed and big check-outs remembered, but free from the pressure and anticipation the mood was more easy and free. Put simply: for John to meet the 12 or 15 people every week, eating was the time for meeting. Those who stuck around could then mix up teams for the friendly games that many, myself included, enjoyed more than the competitive ones. If darts 'wasn't really about the darts', but 'everything else', eating together facilitated a big part of that everything else. This was always missed when playing away at certain pubs – Tony keenly aware of when he was getting a dry sandwich or chips and gravy.

Highmore highlights Arlie Hochschild's (1983) work on emotional labour and the ways that different jobs demand the performance of a breezy affect, and the human cost of this. Pubs are an excellent example of this: the cultivation of *the local* an effort, especially on the part of the landlord and staff, to encourage familiarity and comfort in a setting that for many was reprieve from work and the mundane grind, and for others the very place of work and mundane grind. And more specifically for the darts players, when someone did wonder into The Brown Bear who didn't know there was a darts game on, or expected perhaps a bit more agency in how they chose to enjoy the pub, they were told to be quiet or leave – and to not go near the jukebox.

4.4.3 *Barcelona* was historical

Darts and Stoke-on-Trent have a history. As well as hosting the World Professional Darts Championship when famous darts players were household names, Stoke was backdrop to the great darts torch-passing of Bristow to Taylor. Eric Bristow moved from London to Stoke, a notable London to Stoke cultural migration, and ran the pub where Phil Taylor plied his trade. At the time Bristow was the biggest name in darts and one half of darts' golden couple – with Maureen Flowers, who was an excellent player from Staffordshire – and Bristow supported Taylor early in his career. Before adopting 'The Power' moniker, Taylor borrowed Bristow's 'The Crafty Cockney' and span it to 'The Crafty Potter' – before turning professional Taylor worked in a ceramics factory. Following Taylor, Stoke has produced several world-class players – in all but seven of the Professional Darts Corporation World Championships since 1994 a Stoke player has made the final, and in 2012 it was an all Stoke affair.

This history was alive and close to hand in every anecdote of when *x* beat, or nearly beat *y* in a pub game.

Perhaps more interesting to reflect on is the way that Stoke's wider history of pits and pots, and then industrial decline was made sense of through darts – or that darts shades this history one way. Jayne (2000, 2004) arrives at a depressing conclusion: Stoke is a city unable to foster any kind of post-industrial economy or culture, thus forever limiting any urban regeneration efforts, and this is partly a product of a domineering mono-historical narrative and identity. Focusing on various culture-led regeneration false starts, there were strategic but also cultural failings: "in sum, [Stoke's] working-class, inward-looking perspective is a significant factor in its lowly and entrenched position in terms of urban culture and quality of life" (Jayne, 2004: 201). But starting with darts rather than the stuttering Cultural Quarter, Tony linked its history of tough work to the friendliness that the darts scene thrived on. John similarly cited the lack of posh knobs as the thing that brought people together. And while Jayne (2000: 21) writes that 'civic pride in Stoke is always partly ironic, always tinged with an acceptance that the city won't ever be a contender', there was no irony when Tim said 'it's just getting bigger and better in Stoke-on-Trent'.

Highmore suggests: "our memories have an atmosphere, a mood and series of feelings. And just as our own past is enfolded by feelings, so too is our collective past constantly *mooded*" (2017: 11, emphasis in original). Jayne's focus mood-s Stoke's industrial history one way, and darts mood-s it another. It is the same history but felt and assessed very differently: one enduringly negative and the other enduringly positive.

4.4.4 *Barcelona* was social

If *Barcelona* was the affect then camaraderie was the major effect after my first league game:

> Adapted fieldnotes:
>
> *My first dart misses the board. My hand is shaking and I am far more nervous than I think is reasonable – though this thought is just self-protection, I am not sure what 'reasonable' is, and I am not above missing each and every double. Thankfully Nick and John immediately chirp up: 'G'darts Mark!' 'Two more of them!'. Stunned silence would have been far worse, playful teasing much better.*

Steve told me I was playing in the taxi on the way over and I tried to laugh the moment off. Easily seeing through this John leaned over: 'Just play like you do when we're in the pub, try and relax and remember: it's just darts'.

The club doesn't have quite the mini-arena feel of The Brown Bear – this is good, as the presence of pool players and kids do something to take the edge off things. As well as the drinks I have gulped down.

The team we are playing are toward the bottom of the division, so for others the evening is less pressured. Tony has regularly wandered away to the fruit machine and John off chatting to the staff – he used to play for the club's team, so knows half the bar. But when my game started they all assembled.

My next two darts thud into the 20-bed. Walking back from the board I get some thumbs up and a dampening arm motion from John and Steve: slow down.

The next three are better and so are the three after that. We are well matched in that we are both probably the worst players on our respective teams. I manage to hit a double within six tries – a major relief, avoiding a painfully prolonged finish and closing off the possibility of a 3-0 loss.

The shaking has stopped but my heart is still racing. John's 'just a game of darts' mantra helps and also doesn't – it is the game of darts that I am worried about.

Without knowing how I am ahead in the last leg. John and Steve keep telling me to slow down, and Nick gives the thumbs up after every three darts. Though he evened up the match my opposite is getting visibly more and more frustrated. He keeps anxiously looking at the clock, then at the scoreboard, then at the clock again. After missing a double with my first three, I hit double-10 and the game is over – to loud 'Get in!'-s from behind me. We shake hands and he dashes off – turns out he has a night shift starting in 10 minutes, hence John and Steve stressing I slow him down to wind him up.

Back at The Brown Bear I get drinks bought for me and my antics are exaggerated. I stumble

back to John's thoroughly pleased and content.

Highmore's final steer is that cultural feelings are social and collective, and this is especially intuitive in this research – *Barcelona* emerged with other people rather than when practising at home. The above notes are included to illustrate an admittedly very personal sense of what happened when dartists came together, but also give some context to the *it is just a bit of fun* comments – as well as a 'crack on', Nick also said: "you wouldn't believe the amount of seriousness that goes on just pissing about", and this is a great summation.

Each of these mini-headers has a social element: the jukebox required policing and the games demanded hushed conversations, Adam's cooking brought the players together, and encountering Stoke's darting history kept that history alive. The opening fieldnotes are, at least on one level, an observation of rooms with different numbers of people in them, and Annie's comments are a good reminder of who is in (and out) the room. Under the next header I will spend more time exploring what it means to attach value to these social experiences.

What do you do with something that has been ignored, or thought about too narrowly? Articulating where British Cultural Studies differed from its Marxist influences, Stuart Hall identified: "a humanist objection which holds that the people cannot, should not, be thought of in such thin terms, especially since it is the purpose of cultural analysis to reaffirm their experiences, to bring them forward again in their richness and complexity, in a sense, to do something to pay them back for having been left out of the great tradition" (Hall, [1983] 2016: 47). Against dominant Marxist ideas like base and superstructure, as abstracted concepts that fail to grasp the messiness of culture and meaning, Raymond Williams is highlighted as especially influential in this effort for more richness and complexity. Base and superstructure are not the abstractions that everyday participation is wrestling with, but there is an important point here.

It is the same point that Highmore (2016a) is making about 'culture-at-a-distance'. It seems to me that that everyday participation is an effort to not be at-a-distance, casting the majority of art criticism and cultural value arguments as class-ed abstractions – abstracted from what lots of people

do, and born of an unreflexive grasp of cultural norms. Culture is not one thing: no one is uncultured. But everyday participation is also bound by its own abstraction – that the value that people find in more traditional cultural pursuits, here the 'experts' and opera fans, are only performing a class milieu. This might serve its purpose as a particular cultural justice argument, so long as those abstractions don't define everyday participation – unless the point is to just make clearer the bounded nature of our class habitus, in which case all it can do is prove itself: the seductive 'complete picture' (Highmore, 2016b: 536). A very deliberate politics might come from this (*Justice for darts!*), but without a convincing reason why (*Because it's not posh!*). Again, *not opera* creates a certain distance, and is a limited value argument. As well as not being posh, one might find darts valuable in other ways – or not posh-ness might hold together something more significant, like Williams suggests.

Returning to, and reappropriating Hennion (2001): "[darts] itself is not the end result of a passion of [darts], but a means […] of reaching certain states" (ibid: 9). And refreshing Highmore (2016b): "[a taste for darts] orchestrates sensibilities and that potentially alters our social environment (rather than simply reinforcing already established social relations), generating new liberating possibilities and new 'coercive freedoms'" (ibid: 548). 'Coercive freedoms' is key because these more expansive accounts of cultural taste are not less critical – just less hemmed in. These each have the beginnings of a different kind of value argument – one that values experience, and that might find value (and not) beyond an already-understood idea of symbolic hierarchy. And a more exciting conclusion might come from it: Barcelona-like darts for all? Before concluding, social infrastructure (Klinenberg, 2018; Latham and Layton, 2019), caring infrastructure (The Care Collective, 2020) and conviviality (Gilroy, 2004; 2006; Jackson, 2018; 2020) are introduced as complementary value arguments, that help tie together the last of the fieldwork.

4.5 Social infrastructure

Taking Stoke and *Barcelona* together, 'social infrastructure' is one value argument that might build on everyday participation and the darts case study. Eric Klinenberg defines social infrastructure capaciously as: "the physical spaces and organizations [sic] that shape the way we interact" (2018: 9). Klinenberg's shape-ideal is a reaction to perceived social and political fracturing and the normalisation of market logics – rather than another logic:

> "When social infrastructure is robust, it fosters contact, mutual support, and collaboration among friends and neighbors [sic]; when degraded, it inhibits social activity, leaving families

and individuals to fend for themselves. Social infrastructure is crucially important, because local, face-to-face interactions – at the school, the playground, and the corner diner – are the building blocks of public life. People forge bonds in places that have healthy social infrastructures – not because they set out to build community, but because when people engage in sustained, recurrent interaction, particularly while doing things they enjoy, relationships inevitably grow." (ibid: 9-10)

Like Putman (2000) before, Klinenberg champions a cure of healthy social capital for America's civic deficit, but peppers his argument with inspiration from elsewhere rather than American history – and advances a spatial focus. Social capital is the glue that comes from good social infrastructure: the contact and collaboration and bonding that Klinenberg describes. It is fundamentally different to Bourdieu's social capital (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) – part of a broader thesis in which cultural capital, as discussed earlier, also fits. Social capital in Bourdieu's sense is not the foundation of a prospering society, but the contacts and connections that sustain forms of inequality: it glues people in their place, rather than gluing people together more adventurously – the Debussy admirers and darts lovers kept apart. It is closed rather than open and, taken this way, the groups that Klinenberg sees coming together are in fact groups sustaining themselves in a hierarchy. It is 'durable networks' and 'institutionalised relationships', and not new networks and relationships – John managed to express both these senses of social capital in his interesting not *la-di-da-*'everybody is equal' contradiction. Klinenberg is essentially more hopeful and more prescriptive: we need more spaces for people to come together, and coming together is always good.

Alan Latham and Jack Layton (2019) situate Klinenberg's *Palaces for the People* – nod here to Ian and Andy's pub-palace game – in a longer and mostly American tradition of urban-community ethnographies à la Jane Jacobs, and echoing geographic and sociological concerns. For them social infrastructure is a useful intervention:

"Focusing on social infrastructure draws attention to the affordances that particular spaces or facilities offer for inhabitation and social interaction. It involves looking at the communities and networks of association generated through such spaces. It is also about paying attention to the design and provision of particular facilities and how their material qualities shape the activity that takes place within and around them." (ibid: 5)

I have already suggested that the material qualities that shaped the darts scene were more than pubs and boards, but pub closures were a threat to the league. The previous season to my fieldwork, four pubs closed who had previously hosted teams in the Collerton league. On this Tim was keen to strike an upbeat tone: "you do need a lot of pubs for the league to work, but we've always got around it, we'll continue to work around it". And despite their abundance, Nick had noticed less pubs sporting a dart board than 10 years prior. The reason Nick and most others gave for this was the pressure on pubs to make money – where food sometimes trumped darts: market rather than social infrastructure logic. The rising price of beer meant that many drank at home first or drank less, and this made a darts team less lucrative for pubs than they once had been – though they were still a boost.

One simple but important thing for John was that he could still play darts in his 70s – though not as well and often as he used to. Rather than something that demanded keen athleticism, John was able to forge a deep connection to place and practice because he could do it for 50 years – and no one judged his throw. This, and playing darts didn't cost him too much money: "Just as much as I want to drink!" Living on his own John said his midweek, and not his weekend, was what he looked forward to.

Kate was much newer to the leagues, but a busier darts players than John – playing a couple of times during the week and again in a disability darts league on weekends. Darts, she said, had greatly improved her confidence, and she had grown more comfortable in the sometimes tense pub-darts space – Kate said playing in the men's leagues had especially helped this. Reflecting on her experience, she thought it was important that there were activities that autistic adults and those with physical disabilities could do with other people. Kate found the team atmosphere supportive, and the structured and transparent rhythm of the league nights inviting. Social infrastructure is a means of making a strong argument out of the players' everyday participate-ing, as well as defending against nth degree market logics.

Public libraries are championed by Klinenberg, and Latham and Layton as social infrastructure par excellence, but this is done without much thought to reading. Libraries are places of democratic exchange where difference abounds, but books themselves are relatively ignored. I point this out because with such a normative bend it seems the particular is (maybe) lost to the general. And

despite celebrating a collectivist ethic, this normative argument – that we need good social infrastructure for good social capital – misses another: that for John and Kate, darts was important because it contributed to their human flourishing – that is, in different ways darts met and fulfilled on their human needs. Andrew Sayer (2011) strikes this objectivist-pluralist balance, arguing at points for the fundamental importance of meaningful attachments and supported autonomy. While there can be no prescribed model number of friends or social activities per week, we each have the capacity to feel lonely and left out – and also capacity for joy in the things we love being valued and celebrated. So libraries are important because they bring people together, but surely also because people get to read.

In *Why Things Matter to People* (2011), Sayer delivers blunt criticism of social scientific norms:

> "It seems that becoming a social scientist involves learning to adopt this distanced relation to social life, perhaps so as to be more objective, as if we could become more objective by ignoring part of the object. It therefore often tends to produce bland accounts of social life, in which it is difficult to assess the *import* of things for people […] How people can best live together is not merely a matter of coordination of the actions of different individual by means of conventions, like deciding which side of the road to drive on, but a matter of considering people's capacities for flourishing or suffering. When we think about how to act, we do so with some awareness of the implications for well-being – both ours and that of others. (ibid: 7,8, emphasis in original)

Social scientists are well in the habit of identifying conditions of suffering, but less in the habit of sketching their necessary opposite: flourishing. What side of the road to drive on and concerns over productive spaces for sociality are hardly similar, but the thrust of Sayer's argument is that researchers should engage more with the idea that we are needy beings – and the ways we meet those needs are important. Klindenberg and Sayer differ here in how they look to value sociability: one more concerned with the outcome of good interactions (social capital), and the other more interested in the interactions themselves being vital for a good life (conditions for flourishing). Both are normative, but their focus is different. Sayer describes 'commitments' as something beyond preference – preferences we might happily swap for something we deem similar, but commitments are more significant: "I am committed to certain people, ideas and causes and I can't be bought off,

for *they are ends in themselves*, not merely means to other ends, and commitment to them, in all their irreplaceable specificity, has become part of who I am" (ibid: 126, emphasis added). So darts is an end in itself, rather than a means to a collective social good.

On libraries and reading, what about darts and pubs? Eric Bristow said: "you can take darts out the pub, but you can't take the pub out of darts" (nd: np). Like Taylor's 'Barcelona for darts', it is a neat and rich quote. In terms of social infrastructure, it suggests that while darts is at home in the pub, and that darts is born of pub culture, darts can also make the pub out of anywhere – here I think Bristow was referring to the jolly and boozy atmosphere many associate with British pubs. Latham and Layton (2019) write about 'material qualities shaping the activity', but what about activity shaping the social bit of social infrastructure? This is a question of emphasis, and one that conviviality helps to address. Again, John's darts-football comparison needs addressing – darts in Stoke is especially social.

Bourdieu is one natural social infrastructure critic, and Gill Valentine (2008) is another. Valentine is wise to the idea that people are sometimes just on best behaviour: "urban etiquette does not equate with an ethics of care and mutual respect for difference" (ibid: 329). In a library or elsewhere in would-be social infrastructure, what might look like coming together, and even Klinenberg's social capital, might actually be much more fleeting. Klinenberg writes that something is lost when social infrastructure is not robust, but Valentine is suggesting that something can still be lost even with that infrastructure: encounters with others might harden prejudice, or in the perfecting of good liberal manners, even hide the very real bigotry that is still existing. Valentine is not denying that people might form meaningful connections with others, just not presuming it. And even when they do: "if a common ethics of care and mutual respect emerges from these particular kinds of purposeful, organized [sic] micro-public encounters […] then how can this connectivity be sustained and scaled up in both space and time beyond these moments?" (ibid: 332).

Valentine is asking for a more scalable politics, and this is something The Care Collective (2020) attempt – which I will introduce next. So far Tim is the fiercest social infrastructure champion: 'we're all there for each other, and [darts] brings us a lot closer. It's like for me to live in me house and Joe Bloggs up the street wanting something, it's just that kind of close-knit community, where it's just everybody else looks out [for each other]'. But this is articulated through a sense of place: 'I wouldn't like to do the league anywhere else'. As well as practice, social infrastructure is less alive to how a sense of place might drive the social in social infrastructure – what about Stokie social capital? And without it, maybe the posh knobs would ruin the darts? Highmore suggests: "we need to examine the

shapes that tastes take; the way that they are freighted with feeling; the way that they are carried on the backs of particular 'ethoses' while simultaneously shaping them." (2016b: 561). Ethos is a question that gets lost in a more structural account of cultural taste, but is central in Williams' *Culture is Ordinary* ([1958] 1989) essay. Tim here describes a collective ethos that encouraged and sustained the darts scene, and the feelings were joyous: 'before I've even walked in the pub I'm like *oh my god* I'm going to have jaw ache tonight from laughing, and get some tissues to wipe my eyes cus I'm going to be crying with laughter'.

Nevertheless, the Collerton league needed pubs to function, and a focus on social infrastructure makes this plain. It also goes some way to attaching value to the 'it's not just about the darts' sentiment – the 'everything else' being social. Klinenberg describes a library as a space where lots of people come together and do lots of different things, but the Barcelona-like atmosphere involved some supressing of what the other pub users might want to do. This, and John's posh knobs comment, reflect an ambivalence that seems to go against social infrastructure evangelising. Still, darts needs pubs and Stoke darts needs lots of dart boards – and well lit and maintained ones. Valuing Stoke darts means recognising infrastructure.

4.6 Caring infrastructure

There were a few players who came in and out of darts teams at The Brown Bear. Dave was one of them. He wasn't in steady employment so played mostly when he had the money. He did though play some home games when out of work, as Adam let him run a tab and pay him back later – this was all managed discreetly. Thus by an act of care Dave was not left out.

The Care Manifesto (The Care Collective, 2020) starts with a different but not dissimilar critique of the world to Klinenberg: it is uncaring. This uncaringness robs us of personal and collective fulfilment, and is at the heart of manifest global crises: we are failing to care for the environment, failing to care for poor people, and failing to care for others with abounding nativist sentiments. Building a more caring world is now essential to challenge accelerating cultures of individualism and *profit over people* norms. The Care Collective promote 'promiscuous care': "promiscuous care is an ethics that proliferates outwards to redefine caring relations from the most intimate to the most distant. It means caring *more* in ways that remain experimental and extensive by current standards" (ibid: 41, emphasis in original).

With an idea of caring infrastructure, *The Care Manifesto* promotes something like a married sociological imaginary and firm (care) ethic – caring is good and does good: "prioritising and working towards a sense of universal care – and striving to make this common sense – is necessary for the cultivation of both a caring politics and fulfilling lives" (ibid: 26). For care to proliferate:

> "We need localised environments in which we can flourish: in which we can support each other and generate networks of belonging. We need conditions that enable us to act collaboratively to create communities that support our abilities and nurture our interdependencies." (ibid: 45)

Caring communities have four key features – here caring infrastructure is stricter than social infrastructure. Caring communities are built on mutual support (1), public space (2), sharing of resources (3), and a democratic ethos (4). Where Valentine (2008) might find social infrastructure a bit woolly, The Care Collective establish a broader political project.

While I would argue that the league fostered and facilitated care between dartists, this wasn't done in public space. Adam's work to elevate and celebrate darts at The Brown Bear could be recast as care work – fostering a climate apart from a shit working week. The Care Collective are concerned with systems of organised loneliness (ibid: 45), and to say another simple thing about John and darts: it was something he could go to on his own. It was organisation against loneliness.

There perhaps wasn't though the experimental and always-expansive care *The Care Manifesto* hopes for. During my first league game I was afforded plenty of care by the players on my team – calming words, cheers and encouragement, congratulations after – but not much care was given to the other player who needed to leave for work. This care thrived on team camaraderie in private spaces, and to an extent private groups. It wasn't very democratic when someone came in the pub and was shooed away from the jukebox.

This, I imagine, is why The Care Collective call for better public rather than private spaces, but it seemed a spirit of closeness and not adventurousness in which Adam gave Dave a bar tab: it was more familiar and familial than promiscuous. Adam was also careful when giving Tony his wine – Tony preferred wine over beer but felt self-conscious about it, so with just a nod Adam would pour and

then hide his drink at one end of the bar. In this one can read an ambient hostile masculinity, and this is perhaps the ambivalence of care in private space – but equally evident is Adam's effort to manage that atmosphere.

David Bell's (2009) paper on public ice skating rinks is a useful intervention here. Like The Care Collective, Bell identifies new contestations over public space in many UK cities, and links this to the normalisation of 'competitive urbanism' logics. In post-industrial contexts, and without a welfarist imperative, cities are now much more driven by consumption than production – it is more and more consumption that attracts visitors and thus drives a post-industrial economy, this especially important for middling cities striving to create a distinct and attractive city narrative and branding. Visitors then are really customers, and since sitting in a park doesn't generate any earning, they are no longer visitors: "this reshaping of the policy landscape has ushered in new exclusions, it has been argued, as culture becomes more of a tool in economic development than a shared social resource" (ibid: 6). This has changed and, at least in one sense, damaged public space.

This 'entrepreneurial governance' is driven by what is fashionable and enticing, and Bell identifies temporary ice rinks as especially in vogue. Bell figures this as part of a broader 'festivalisation' of Christmas time – a festivalision that makes capitalist sense for cities in terms of sellable assets and attractions. Paying close attention to a temporary ice rink in Leeds, that takes over a public square for months every year, read one way this is a death of the commons. This death of the commons is against the values of a properly public, and indeed more caring urban ideal – because what is public about entrance fees? So far, so uncaring.

Bell though resists this reading: the commons is not a flat thing. While the rink robs others of space to sit, it also affords skaters other more playful experiences. This playfulness and openness, despite its urban entrepreneurial beginnings, seems to encourage the promiscuity and experimentation The Care Collective champion. Bell presents a more conflicted view of these instances of privatised public space: "the embodied pleasure of moving over ice, the sensorial pleasures of the cold, the festive socialities of the season and the visual pleasures of the spectacle of people skating, are intensely productive of an urban vitality that is popular, democratic and intensely sociable" (ibid: 15). It is not so much a tragedy of the commons as a changing of the commons. And yet, something of the commons is lost.

So coming back to the darts, one can take from Bell that private spaces are not just private and public

spaces not just public – and private spaces in one sense can be newly public. This tension is apparent in Kate's comments: the dependability and consistency of the league nights, easier to manage in private rather than public space, was vitally important.

4.7 Conviviality

Conviviality is a term used to explore the ambiguity of living and rubbing along together – this is the last value argument in this chapter. In similar fare to all the above, in *Tools for Conviviality* (1973) Ivan Illich makes an expansive critique of industrial society and positions conviviality as its antidote. Against industrial tools, convivial tools and a 'convivial mode of production' would liberate societies from the narrowing vision of the good life under capitalism (ibid: 17). Conviviality is then: "autonomous and creative intercourse among persons, and the intercourse of persons with their environment; and this in contrast with the conditioned response of persons to the demands made upon them by others, and by a man-made environment" (ibid: 11).

Paul Gilroy (2004, 2006) though is the spark of recent sociological interest in conviviality. Gilroy describes conviviality as: "a social pattern in which different metropolitan groups dwell in close proximity but where their racial, linguistic and religious particularities do not [...] add up to discontinuities of experience or insuperable problems of communication" (2006: 27). Recognising Britain's post-Empire *former glory* complex, and before it would take centre stage a decade later, these convivial happenings offer a break and glimpse of something different. Mike Skinner and *The Streets* get a more careful look in *After Empire* (Gilroy, 2004) than earlier in this chapter. Skinner's music, in its playful and ambivalent reading of Little England, finds race: "essentially insignificant, at least when compared either to the hazards involved in urban survival or to the desperate pleasures of the postcolonial city" (ibid: 105). The multiculture Skinner describes is both 'vibrant' and 'ordinary' (ibid: 107), and at least in the music, Little England seems to lose its anxiousness and fear – and so holds together something convivial and hopeful. Importantly, to acknowledge conviviality is not to deny the existence of racism, or that in a more convivial setting cultural differences do not exist. Race is though 'unruly' (Gilroy, 2004: xiv), and not so easily reduced to hierarchy (Valluan, 2016).

While on one hand a standard for evaluating social settings, conviviality now brackets wider interests in the productive ways that people do and manage social life – while retaining Gilroy's unruliness. Amanda Wise and Greg Noble (2016) articulate this as: "against more structurally-orientated explanations of social order these theories see something in the nature of interaction itself which had

to be addressed" (ibid: 424). Similarly, Magdalena Nowicka and Steven Vertovec (2014: 342) claim that: "conviviality can be used as an analytical tool to ask and explore the ways, and under what conditions, people constructively create modes of togetherness". Conviviality reflects a more practice-makes-place than place-makes-practice approach – this different to social infrastructure. And the language of social capital, that social infrastructure borrows, is avoided – not 'bridging', this suggesting a categorical fixity, but something more radically open (Gilroy, 2004).

Emma Jackson's (2018, 2020) research in a bowling alley in Finsbury Park, North London is an excellent example of a convivial approach – and if repositioned, everyday participation. Putnam, and so perhaps Klinenberg, is cast as overly moralising: the focus on bonds obscuring the lively and changing ways that different groups occupy the same space, and too reliant on an already-understood idea of community.

Like Bell, Jackson (2018) recognises that commercial spaces are not one thing – what is especially clear in Jackson's research is the diverse users and uses of the bowling alley. In a gentrifying area, and in the context of increased austerity, it is a space under threat. Jackson frames competing interests in the bowling alley around value and values (Skeggs, 2014): value being dominated by economic value, and the social and cultural values expressed by community groups and users – more like an emergent spatial ethos. Prevailing economistic value narratives are at odds with the values of the alley as a convivial stage. The space is wonderfully chaotic:

> "Festooned in neon and chrome Americana, the bowling alley is a lively space that also contains karaoke booths, a games arcade and pool tables. While the interior speaks of the sport's American roots, the ethnic and social diversity of the clientele offers a snapshot of contemporary London. A group of local teenagers do outlandish dances when they get strikes, irritating the serious league bowlers on the next lane who travel from across London and hail from Guyana, Slovakia, the USA and the neighbouring area of Highbury. Here work nights out, children's birthday parties and date nights all take place alongside each other." (ibid: 79-80)

Reading Jackson's research there are a lot of obvious parallels. After spending time in a regular bowling league, Jackson (2020) describes bowling as a 'practice of belonging and becoming', here insisting on community as a verb not a noun, and this echoes Annie's thoughts on darts and being

involved – belonging to the team and becoming part of the scene. The mythmaking also rings true –
the nicknames and catch-phrases at the bowling league giving a heightened sense of meaning and
attachment. Bumping into darts professionals had the same effect, and the arc of the darts season
creating drama and narrative.

Figure 7: *The darts tournament*

Thinking convivially brings the practice of darts into sharper focus. The Stoke leagues regularly
brought dartists together, and even outside the leagues, as John said: 'you walk in a pub and people
go 'Want a bit of darts', 'We'll have a bit of darts'. It's the best way to meet people'. Like Wise and
Noble suggest: "[conviviality] is done here, by these people in this context, sometimes routinised,
sometimes improvised" (2016: 426). Darts was a way of doing being together, like the bowling league,
and this was productive of particular socialities – where John felt like he could talk to anyone with a
dart in their hand, so belonging in people and place were made easy.

What doesn't ring true is the messiness – this is part of the charm of the bowling alley: "the co-
presence of different kinds of groups and practices feeds into producing a particular atmosphere in
the bowling alley" (ibid: 529). Gilroy's conviviality is interested in moments of unsteadiness, but darts
in Stoke was rarely unsteady. Jackson describes groups joyously rubbing along, but as I have already
suggested *Barcelona* was in many ways a collective effort against rubbing along. In the fieldnotes from

the darts tournament, the differences between the front and back hall of the working men's club are marked. What was driving that atmosphere was all darts.

And thinking convivially forces some reflection on the ambivalence of closeness and familiarity, and a return to the end of Hesmondhalgh's night out. Arriving at The Brown Bear early one week I sat reading as a news story about knife crime in London ran on the pub TV screens. A few seated at the bar proceeded to make racist jokes, and loudly suggest that the reason knife crime wasn't higher in Stoke was because it was less ethnically diverse. So long as 'you can't take the pub out of darts', one can't ignore the exclusions and prejudices that manifest. This is an important reminder of Valentine's cautioning, and of the difficulties in wrestling with a value argument. Of course, these are questions that equally have to be asked of traditionally cultural practices in traditionally cultural spaces.

I will return to conviviality for much longer in the next chapter, advancing an argument that, against the constraints of formation dance, the particular unruliness of Lynda's classes reflected a different way of ageing together. The line dancers rubbed along with lawn bowlers and running groups and snooker players, but not so much at The Brown Bear – and conviviality underlines this.

4.8 Conclusion: darts for all?

During my time in the darts league John kindly let me stay at his flat – often after too many drinks and having missed the last train to Manchester. John was retired and lived alone. Though he played less than he used to, darts still anchored his weeks. It was intensely valuable as a social experience, and more than this as something that mattered and he mattered in it – he was the elder statesman on the team, ready and able to give out advice and calm nerves. On every outing he seemed to know someone. The league gave him good reason to visit different clubs and pubs, and to see how they changed and to comment on the quality of the beer. Even when he wouldn't be able to play anymore, his hand having properly packed in, he said he would still go along to support and be part of it. "Without darts, I wouldn't know what to do with myself".

I started this chapter saying that Phil Taylor provided a rich starter for questions of culture, value, place, and taste. Everyday participation offers a packaged theory of each: canonical culture is oppressive and dogmatic, but there are many things that people enjoy beyond high art. We need to restate the primacy of place in placeless cultural value discourses, and embrace tastes that have wrongly been considered vulgar and uncultured. Like Highmore's (2016b) description of Bourdieu, it is

a 'complete picture', and all the more tempting for it. But at the end of this chapter there is no answer to Taylor's follow up: what if there is nothing else to do? Towards the end of this chapter I have brought in other perspectives that are necessary, I would argue, for taking the question of value seriously – the offhanded racism just described makes this plain. Everyday participation would need to embrace a range of evaluations to avoid an unhelpful Culture (value) Wars.

Despite not being able to write *Why Darts Matters*, the beginnings of this argument are here: what mattered to John was that darts was sociable and something he could do on his own; for Annie and Kate darts brought all the joys of being involved; Tony was able to play darts 'casually' and still play most days of the week; and Nick could forget work and throw himself into something more fun. 'Experiential meanings' matter (Highmore, 2016b), as well as the abundance of darts in Stoke.

Everyday participation seems to miss some of the politics of Williams' argument. Drawing an analogy between his Welsh working class upbringing and his experiences in Cambridge, he was not oppressed by Cambridge:

> "I was not amazed by the existence of a place of learning […] Nor was learning, in my family, some strange eccentricity; I was not, on a scholarship in Cambridge, a new kind of animal up a brand-new ladder. Learning was ordinary; we learned when we could. Always, in those scattered white houses, it had made sense to go out and become a scholar or a poet or a teacher. Yet few of us could be spared from the immediate work; a price had been set on this kind of learning, and it was more, much more, than we could individually pay." (Williams, ([1958] 1989: 5)

I wonder if Williams would find everyday participation patronising – while clearly rejecting the idea of working class cultural deficit, his argument is much more careful. While scathing toward establishment culture and the 'old rules', Williams wants to 'clear the channels' for a cultural growth that is more radically democratic, and to save arts and learning from a deadening permanence.

What seems especially lost is the socialist ethic that drives Williams' argument – Kay (2021) has recently suggested that despite so many of Williams' ideas being cultural-studies-common-sense, the politics behind the theory has fallen away. It is important to note Gilroy's (1987) criticism of William's 'strategic silences' on issues of race – and a kind of class authenticity that is perhaps hostile to more

diverse ideas of class. Similarly, Start Hall asked of Williams' culture as 'a whole way of life': "whose way? Whose life? One way or several?" ([1992] 2017: 280). Williams saw something politically hopeful in his Welsh upbringing – and not somewhere culturally backward. While *Culture is Ordinary* is romantic, and perhaps uncritically so, one can take from it that both senses of culture, in people and practice, can hold together something meaningfully cultural and political: 'the best basis for any future society'. This is a very different cultural value argument to everyday participation, and one that needs some intersectional awareness – Williams' sense of cultural growth as 'a continual offering for common acceptance' seems alive to this, as long as that 'common acceptance' remains expansive.

In this chapter I have attempted to draw out the connection between taste and place, and especially emphasise a taste for darts in Stoke – and not represent darts as a static class signifier. The Barcelona-like quality of darts in Stoke – the line at the bar and the breathless thrill of the darts tournament – is central to this. What mattered was that darts mattered. In this chapter I set out to do two things: firstly to explore Phil Taylor's quote, and secondly to wrestle with the argument for everyday participation. In the process I have also done something else: demonstrate the difficulties in making a value argument, or at least my difficulties. Running through in order of appearance: everyday participation is an attempt to bypass biases in understanding of 'low' cultural practice, and restate the value of a variety of leisure activities; social infrastructure puts value on the kinds of social capital that manifest from shared usage of space; Sayer's (2011) focus on flourishing stresses the value of sociability as a good in and of itself; The Care Collective (2020) advocate for the kind of care that is good and does good – so something between Sayer and social infrastructure; and Gilroy's (2004, 2006) conviviality celebrates messy and transgressive racial relations with a keen focus on practice – different to social infrastructure with its more disruptive aim. As well as these, Hesmondhalgh's (2013) advocacy for music as a personal and social good, and Williams' ([1958] 1989) want for a more democratic and ultimately more socialist cultural ecology compliment yet complicate the question of what is valuable. I will return to several of these ideas in the line dancing discussion.

Perhaps a final problem with everyday participation is there isn't the suggestion that maybe everyone should have access to Barcelona-like darts – its insistent relativism being almost conservative. And even if it isn't darts, a more exciting, and perhaps a more politically useful conclusion might be that darts in Stoke is an example of commitments flourishing – and commitments flourishing is a good thing. This comes back to Sayer (2011: 125): "there is [...] no clear distinction between our own flourishing and that of our commitments; they are fused". Rather than simply confirming a taste for darts, to engage with a passion is to be changed by it in some way – in realising something collectively

significant, and transforming the lives of those doing it for the better. I would argue commitments, and with it a keener humanist sense of the value of things to people, is one way of saving everyday participation and developing a more compelling value case. Another way would be something more explicitly political: that people and practice can hold together something meaningfully socialist. In the next chapter I will engage with this idea.

Finally, lingering in the back of this chapter is a question of smallness – and what smallness means and feels like. Adding to Bell and Jayne (2006), smallness in the darts scene had to do with a heightened sense of the particular: in the different pubs, the different throws, the different teams and the different food. And this smallness felt quite big – like Ian and Andy's *palace not a pub* game, rather than Mike Skinner's decaying dart board. Mike Skinner might be speaking to a sense of smallness and parochialism, even everydayness, but not a sense that it is thriving. All this, and darts was very looked after in Stoke.

The ideas and questions in this chapter continue into the next, though the argument is perhaps more propulsive. At the end of this chapter it seems important to ask: why insist that darts exists in the same category of experience as art? Maybe it is something different, and that is fine – maybe even good.

5 The value of mistakes

"If you're feeling down, and you've had a bad morning, you can come here, you forget your aches and pains, you have a laugh [...] It's a tonic."
Dawn

"We share each others joys, we share each others sorrows y'know. It's more than just the dancing, whereas that's the main part of it! [laughs]."
Ruby

Adapted fieldnotes:

[8:00pm]
The first sounds of the guitar are met with approving nods. Several who have been sitting get up and assume their places on the floor. It's a soft rock song called 'Ich mach meine Augen zu (Every Time I Close My Eyes)' by Chris Norman and Nino de Angelo. It isn't 'dance music' but the tempo suits line dancing – stepping on the beat it doesn't feel too slow like it's dragging, but not so fast that any quicker steps feel rushed. Not 'dance music' but good line dance music. Despite myself I like the song.

There's 15 or so seconds of intro before the routine starts. Some hum along dancing on the spot, settling into the mood of it. Others continue conversations from before and some get a quick drink from the side. The hall was chilly in the winter but now hot in summer. The doors at the back are open letting a breeze in, and from my seat I can see lawn bowlers enjoying the long evenings. There are about 50 people in the class tonight, most of whom are now on the floor. Dancers adjust to make sure everyone has enough space.

As the verse starts and the group weaves to the right stepping on the beat, finishing with a shuffle step to punctuate. Beginner level line dances can sometimes look quite stompy but this one doesn't – this helped by the soft and (even sickly) sweet music. The dancers weave back across to the left with a quarter turn at the end. Lynda's prompts briefly interrupt the music.

Focusing on one row their movements have a lot of musicality – rising and falling as the song dips and swells, and extending everything out when it slows down. Lynda liked to joke: 'Use

your hips if you've still got 'em!' On others the look of concentration is more obvious, anticipating the restart – this would be me if I weren't sitting out watching.

Restart negotiated the dance continues into the chorus. The lyrics so far have all been in German, but as the chorus repeats Chris Norman starts up: 'Every time I close my eyes, Every time I fantasise'. Several start singing along here. 'The way that she touches me, To know that she loves me, Makes me feel like touching the skies'.

Figure 8: *View of the dancers from the back of the hall*

[9:30pm]

Quite a lot of the dancers have gone home – about half are still here. 'What do you fancy then?' Lynda asks. By this point the student-teacher artifice has all but faded. The dancers agree on a popular routine that Lynda choreographed a few years ago – lasting several weeks at the top of the most downloaded list on CopperKnob. 'Ok sure, why not!'.

Lynda gets off the stage and takes off her mic – no need to remind the dancers of the steps. She joins the others on the floor and David starts the music.

Conversation peters out at the sides – those that are sitting enjoying the spectacle. It feels more like a performance as no one is being taught. But not a performance for an audience. The dancers spread out and traverse the floor more expansively.

It is dark outside but warm in the hall. It's endlessly pleasing watching the shifts in movement (almost) match the shifts in the music. The whole thing is beautiful and hypnotic and intimate.

There is something else to do in Stoke other than darts and Waterworld: line dancing. And while Lynda wasn't Phil Taylor, she was a well-known line dance choreographer and teacher. This chapter and case study begins with a similar commitment: Stoke is not uncultured.

The chapter starts with a very different idea of cultural justice: justice for cultural things. Mark Banks (2017) has an answer to Phil Taylor's Waterworld problem – that it is indeed a problem. Cultural objects and activities matter because they enrich our lives individually and collectively. Banks fundamentally resists an argument like everyday participation – while not denying the importance and value of darts to dartists, this is not a questions of either/or, but both. For Banks, everyday participation is too fundamentally relativist – while our engagement with culture is not straightforwardly predictable, it is important to try and wrestle some sense of what cultural objects do and what they offer. This chapter starts by introducing this argument.

Having established this interest in cultural objects and practices, I present a tension between an idea of the cultural thing (here line dancing) and a cultural thingness (how the line dancing was done). This is like the distinction between darts and *Barcelona* in the last chapter, but there is a difference – because the thingness of Lynda's classes at times went against the rules of line dancing, rather than the heightened *it mattered that it mattered* of darts in Stoke. Banks offers a theory of how to grapple with a cultural thingness – being the particular ways that cultural value manifests – but as the chapter goes on, I introduce other literature that extend a question of cultural thingness. Dancing is always done in body and space, and different questions arise from this. In this chapter I will argue that the line dancing club became a space for solidarity, and as an emergent affect and action this went beyond the steps – and yet the steps were still significant: moving in unison.

Like the darts, during fieldwork I was constantly told by the line dancers that 'it's just about the dancing'. The 'everything else' at Lynda's classes had to do with ageing and grief: line dancing is a rare partnerless dance, and the significance of that changed over time – Lynda's had been teaching line dancing in Stoke for 30 years, and the nature of the classes had changed with the dancers. A commitment to an always contradictory 'everyday' helps make sense of grieving at Lynda's classes – it wasn't unusual or untoward for the dancers to be dealing with loss, but losing a partner is anything

but ordinary.

Williams' idea of cultural growth is guiding – the 'difficult full space' and 'original full time'. The classes, which took place at a working men's club, were given the time and space by a committee that understood what the dance classes meant to the regulars: it was an essential piece of social infrastructure, and more than this cultural infrastructure. In that full space and time the classes changed, and any value argument emerging from this case study has to engage with that change. At the end of this chapter I introduce 'cultural democracy' (Wilson, Gross and Bull, 2017) as a policy strategy that might help capture and defend this evolution.

While conviviality is a useful analytical frame, I am still not describing Gilroy's (2004; 2006) vision of it. The unruliness of Lynda's had to do with an unruly ageing, and a lack of adhering to the dancing rules. But in other ways the classes were not that disruptive, and were the product of a long shared history and experience. There is an interesting question here about the kind of care born of a particular intimacy and understanding.

This chapter pivots on the idea that *when the dancing went wrong, the evening went right* – where the dancing mistakes, or 'variations' were as valuable as the dancing itself, and valuable in a different way. Here I return to the question of emergent ethos and 'emphases', and I discuss much more the questions of culture and politics. As the chapter concludes I am less cautious. Lynda's classes were a space in which solidarity flourished, and while there was a particular history and meaning to that solidarity, what needs understanding are the conditions in which those classes thrived: the difficult full space, and original full time. This, without losing the importance of practice – what was it about line dancing?

5.1 Justice for line dancing

In *Creative Justice* (2017), Banks develops a theory of cultural value that starts with the potentials of given cultural objects. It's not that these objects have perfectly legible or predictable effects and meanings, but we can say they do certain kinds of things – or have certain potentials. It is in these potentials manifest, and in the variety of these manifestations that we can begin to see and say why cultural things have value, and why they matter individually and collectively:

"[Cultural objects] are not *merely* distillations of social convention and interest. They also have their own objective properties (including aesthetic ones), which allow them to be proliferative and generative at the point of encounter with human subjects. Here, they might also have *another* objective value in terms of serving human needs – such as, say, for care, communication, nurturing and recognition – that prefigure the discourses that we use to describe and understand them. Taken together, we might say that these are part of the complex reasons why art and culture might have *value* – and partly why people might choose to make or engage with them in the first place, whether in the cultural industries or beyond." (ibid: 31, emphasis in original)

Banks wants to challenge a 'culture as distillations of social convention and interest' absolute, and brackets three ways in which this thinking seems imperfect. I will use these as an analytic to offer a cultural value account of line dancing – here working through a favourite dance as an example.

Though challenging the absolutism of a Bourdieu-like take on cultural value, Banks insists on the importance of this work: in unsettling any idea of an unfettered artistic gaze, and in exposing the making and maintaining of high cultural activities at the dismissal of others. What is lost though is any sense of the cultural thing in the middle of this – this rendered a vessel of ongoing class and structural struggle. Thus Bank's starting point is more akin to Highmore (2016b) and Hennion (2001), though more resolved to develop a neater cultural value argument.

In introducing Banks' frame I will draw more on my own experiences of learning to line dance. I do this to help move through the theory, after which my voice will drop out.

5.1.1 *Properties and powers of line dancing*

The routine starts with a heel twist, where the feet stay parallel but you flick your heels out to the right and back. Then you kick your right foot out and hook your (right) heel behind your (left) standing leg. Next, without having put your right foot down, you step your right foot forward and bring your left leg up to meet it, then left foot back and right foot back to meet it. Then straight into a grapevine, traversing and stepping one foot behind the other to the right, and then grapevine back to the left. On the last beat of the second grapevine you slide your

right foot across the floor and turn 90 degrees. Then into a rocking chair, where you rock forward and back keeping the (left) standing foot planted. Next two heel struts – heel-toe stepping right foot then left foot. Then the last bit of the sequence, stepping your right foot out and moving your left foot to meet it over three beats – shuffling heel-toe so part of the foot is always touching the floor. Then the same but stepping with your left and your right foot shuffles to meet it.

These are the steps to Down On Your Uppers – a line dance set to a song of the same name by Derek Ryan, and a regular at Lynda's classes. Banks (2017) wants to first focus on cultural objects and their properties and powers:

"[Cultural objects] tend to suggest particular meanings, atmospheres or auras. While these are subjectively apprehended, and socially constructed, they are *also*, at the same time, objective – not simply because they too have an existence that is independent of the discourses that describe them – but because they represent one of the inherent features of [a cultural object]; namely, that it is an entity that innately contains *aesthetic codes.*" (ibid: 20, emphasis in original)

Dancing of course isn't an object, but I am revising this as an opportunity to think carefully about the place of the activity in the cultural moment, and what the activity does – or can do. On one level line dancing is more object-like than other forms of dance: routines more object than anything routine-less.

I liked the way the Down On Your Uppers routine seemed to bounce along. I liked the heel twists and the flick at the start, that seemed to follow nicely from the end of the sequence when looping back round. I found the transition to chorus very pleasing, the dance matching the emphatic crescendo as the vocal goes 'ooohhh, You're down on your uppers'. It was a nice energetic routine, and different to the sweet-melancholy dance this chapter starts with. It also got the blood flowing. These things are subjectively apprehended, 'I liked' 'I felt' etc., but the energetic-ness was also in the music and movements: these things 'suggested'

More than a set of steps, line dancing is a set of steps done together. And though lots of forms and practices of dancing can be collective, line dancing can be collective in particular ways – while line dancing you are in effect partnered with the room. The Down On Your Uppers routine to me felt joyfully collective, affecting in a different way to the I Close My Eyes routine. Again this is subjectively realised, but it is also surely in the 'aesthetics codes' and their "structures, powers and potentials" en masse (Banks, 2017: 20).

5.1.2 *Experiences of line dancing*

LineDanceDallas5 is popular line dancing tutorial channel on YouTube. Each video starts with a group performance of the particular routine, before a slower demonstration of the steps in English and then Chinese. The channel doubles as advertising for classes run in Plano, Texas, and has over 100 million views.

In recent videos the group demonstrations take place in a modern and functional looking sports hall. Mirrors run along one side of the room, and at the other you can see what looks like gym equipment stacked and pushed out the way. The lighting is bright and slightly harsh. There is a speaker hung in one corner – in the videos the music is dubbed over, but I can imagine the tinny sound in the room's dull expanse. There is a sparsely populated notice board in the middle of the back wall. After my time at Lynda's classes the room doesn't look all that homely – even if the movements do.

Figure 9: *Leg flicks all in sync in the LineDanceDallas tutorial for Down On Your Uppers* (LineDanceDallas5, 2017)

Putting some substance behind these biases:

> "We might propose that it is the (objective) physical and aesthetically coded qualities of [a cultural object] that combine with apprehending subjects in differing social contexts to help create distinctive patterns of reception, which – while exhibiting some social regularity – also open up spaces of aesthetic indeterminacy, or relational 'emergent' situation, that is somewhat more open-ended and unpredictable in its outcomes and effects than conventional sociology currently allows for." (Banks, 2017: 20-21)

Here is a way to frame the culture around the cultural thing: 'the differing social contexts' that affect 'distinctive patterns of reception'. One of the obvious social contexts is the room the dancing was done in – this clear in my reaction against the LineDanceDallas5 tutorial.

Being 'down on your uppers' means looking shabby, describing having worn through the soles of a shoe to the point of walking on the 'uppers'. The phrase fits with the familiar tone and patter of the Derek Ryan song, that describes a happy and adventurous rural childhood swapped for harsher adult city life. 'Down on your uppers' is a call to home, as the singer remembers his mother complaining about his worn-through shoes after hours spent playing out – this memory a comfort in adulthood. This is in the 'properties and powers' of the music-dance combo, where home is not just suggested but heavily suggested.

Lynda described a homely habit of dancing at a working men's club:

> "I mean they stand in the same spot of the floor, I mean when all these have gone home they're still down there! And there's all this space here. That's always the same in working men's clubs."

This was true of my time at the classes – the regulars all had their space on the floor and seats at the side. After a few weeks I had found my spot in the hall on the end of one row. I was expected there every week, and I enjoyed being expected. As Lynda described this habit was of working men's clubs

rather than line dancing:

> "I've tried to say … like if you come in and the beginners are sitting in your seats … somebody might sit where your coat is [laughs], but it's very difficult because you don't want to upset the beginners because they've just arrived, but you don't want to upset them people who have been coming years […] Some people will come in [as] beginners and say 'Where can I sit?', which is good cos I can say 'It's not often someone sits there', and then some will come and you'll guarantee they'll sit at a table where 8 people are going to come sit, then the regulars come in and they still sit in the same bit! *Oh god* [laughs]."

Working men's club customs affected the dancing – the habit of having a seat or space important and imported into the dancing. And as Lynda said these homely habits had a flipside – being at times not so homely to newcomers. The use of 'Derekeen' in the song, this west of Ireland slang for young/little Derek, was a homely reference lost on me – the 'properties and powers' of the cultural thing not landing in this case. But having a spot on the floor, in a room with much more personality than the LineDanceDallas5 sports hall, and amongst bowlers and snooker players and runners exercising their familiarity excited something homely that wasn't neatly of the cultural thing – but a thingness of how it was done.

5.1.3 *Why line dancing matters*

Beyond the basics, the Down On Your Uppers routine was the first I felt like I mastered, or came as close to mastering as I managed. I had always liked the idea of learning to dance more formally, but by a combination of sober shyness and general impatience I had never followed through on that desire. Up to then dancing for me was always intoxicated and informal, though not downplaying the importance of these experiences. With more time at the club I stopped having to think as actively about the steps, and instead was able to follow the music and the room. Maybe by the end there was even a bit of musicality in my movements – experiencing, even if fleetingly, the very *other* way of using your body when dancing. Despite the scripted-ness of the routine this all felt very liberating.

I usually arrived at Lynda's classes after several hours of public transport. I didn't like where I was living and I didn't know where my research was going, which made the first few journeys

(existentially) painful. I felt a bit lost. Like Derek Ryan I wasn't one for big cities, but rather than longing for childhood I started to recognise a sense of home in the steps. Borrowing from Emma Jackson (2020), the Down On Your Uppers routine became almost a 'practice of belonging'. I knew the steps, I had somewhere to stand, and I realised I might end up with something to write about at the end of it all. And borrowing again from Jackson, it was also a 'practice of becoming' – in gaining in competency, the steps coming more naturally, and being able to look up more often at smiling faces and enjoy the flow of the group about the room. 'Belonging' versus 'becoming' captures the active and changing feelings of collectivity, and what it feels like learning to dance.

Banks (2017) focuses first on cultural things in a more material sense, then the contexts in which these things exist or happen in, and finally stresses the importance of this coming together of thing and thingness – why this matters:

> "[Cultural objects] have the aesthetic capacity to bring out emotions and feelings, or even bodily movements and physical reactions that *matter*, in the sense of making and remaking one's experiences of being alive in a world of others, and that contribute to a sense of self-reflection, wellbeing, awareness or pleasure (or something opposite or other). Crucially, such effects are not merely socially conditioned, nor straightforwardly predictable, but also emergent in and through [our] subjective engagement with the [cultural object]. This engagement is itself not merely 'subjective' in the sense of simply referring to what I or other individuals might happen to think or feel about [the cultural object], but may be (at least partly) linked to the existence of some *objective* needs that are common to all human subjects – such as the need for care, our social dependencies and the necessity of addressing various kinds of lack, want and desire associated with our capacities as humans to flourish or suffer." (Banks, 2017: 21, emphasis in original)

Banks makes a Sayer-like link between subjective experience and more objective ideas of wellbeing – Sayer (2011) would not, I think, level at Banks that this perspective 'becomes more objective by ignoring part of the object'. To have a place somewhere, to have various kinds of pain eased, and all the pleasures of moving to music matter because they reflect essential human needs. Cultural things matter because they are uniquely able to meet those needs. What Banks doesn't do is elaborate much on 'aesthetic codes' or 'aesthetic capacity'. There isn't a longer persuasive argument like in *Why*

Music Matters (Hesmondhalgh, 2013) for the value of cultural forms especially in contributing to human flourishing – through this comes a clearer idea of flourishing against suffering. Being broader Banks can't offer this, beyond saying that cultural practices matter in ways that aren't simply subjective.

What Banks does do is value unpredictability, or at least allow for it, and is much closer to Hesmondhalgh on the (not quite) subjective vs. (not quite) objective spectrum sketched in the last chapter. The *material*, *experience*, then *matters* framing, despite not fleeing from established cultural hierarchies à la everyday participation (this more the 'conventional sociology' Banks refers to), could be usefully applied to darts in Stoke: a darts match and a darts league are full of the potential for sociability and entertainment (*material*), but it was the *Barcelona*-like status and practice of darts in Stoke that shaped this (*experience*), all of which was important to dartists variously (*matters*).

I will now go through three unpredictabilities at the line dance club: three things that reflect a thingness in the way the dancing was done. The value of Banks' framing is the anticipation of unpredictability, but it's here that the cultural value case gets murky. Trying to think through these unpredictabilities, that give a better picture of the club's goings-on than my own *learning to dance* story, leads back to many of the questions at the end of the last chapter. While this upsets a convincing Banks-like cultural value argument, Banks' framing is still very useful in understanding this.

5.2 The unpredictabilties

These unpredictabilities shift the focus of this chapter and expand an idea of what was valuable about the classes for the regulars. Each unpredictability is different, but together show a special familiarity between the dancers and the dancing, and a shared understanding of what it meant to age together. Highmore (2016b) describes cultural tastes as 'unfinished': "we are made and unmade as we attach ourselves to sensorial worlds" (ibid: 561). Taken together, each of these unpredicabilties speak to the value of the classes being 'unfinished'.

5.2.1 Aesthetic codes?

> "If it's got a good beat, a good rhythm that you can really get into the swing of it, that's what makes a good dance. And it doesn't have to be country, no it can be- well as you know

[Lynda] does a lot of modern stuff, so as long as it's got a good rhythm to it and it's got a good beat, and you can get into the movement of it then I class that as a good dance. And it doesn't have to be a difficult dance, or a beginner's dance, as long as it's *nice* it's a good dance to me."

This description is filled with aesthetic concerns. For Caroline, who had been line dancing with Lynda for 20 years, a good dance wasn't a matter of easy or difficult, or even the type of music, but in the rhythm and the beat and the swing of it. Dancing though was also talked about in lots of other ways at the club – less aesthetic and at times much more pragmatic:

"I'm trying to keep fit and keep all the aches and pains at bay that come with the age and whatever, cos I think if you keep your joints supple it keeps the arthritis and rheumatisms at bay y'know [...] Plus with the line dancing when you learn new steps and different dances it also keeps the brain working, cos you're learning new movements, so we're hoping it keeps the memory in good order, and that's basically what we come for."

Another veteran of the club described dancing in a similar way:

"I was a nurse and the ward sister said she wanted a different form of exercise other than going to a gym, and she said 'Will you come to line dancing with me' and I said 'Yeah yeah I'll give it a go' [...] It's good exercise, and not only is it good exercise it's good for the body and good for the mind as well. Because you're learning sequences y'know it's good for the memory, and I was reading a few week ago in a magazine that line dancing is one of the best things to ward off dementia, there's nobody in Lynda's class with dementia and we've- I mean I'm 73 and we've got some in their 80s y'know so … it's great."

Josie started attending Lynda's classes after struggling to manage her arthritis. Doing weight-bearing exercise was important in helping her build strength but aerobics classes and other activities were causing too much pain. As well as the physical impact, this left her very isolated:

"I just needed something that would just get me out basically. So I thought I'd try line dancing and I really love it. It's music- it's not all country so […] And it's the social side, the fundraising, the dressing up, weekends in Blackpool y'know, it's the whole package. And if you go away for a weekend it's not just the line dancing it's the shopping [laughs], it is everything yes, very enjoyable."

Here line dancing as a weight-bearing exercise was a way into line dancing as a cultural activity – Josie was a proper enthusiast who enjoyed learning new routines at home. It was also a way to meet people and enjoy weekends away. This is a different way of thinking about the steps and a different way of thinking about their value. This forces the question of who is doing the dancing – aches and pains and all. The unpredictability here is in coming to a dance class not so much wanting to dance as wanting to get your steps in and brain-train. And really this is dancing, just talked about in a less obviously cultural way. Like if you joined a choir to stop yourself getting a sore throat.

Outside of cultural value questions, line dancing has been discussed in similar ways. In leisure studies, Joseph and Southcott (2019) emphasise the reported physical, cognitive and social benefits of line dancing classes in Australia. They find that line dancing classes were an effective way for regulars to manage isolation in later life and physical decline. Against an idea that life gets smaller and less fulfilling with age: "[the dancers] are enacting a different stereotype of successful and active ageing in which older people join classes, physically and socially participate, and learn new things" (ibid: 83). Nadasen (2008) also describes a range of benefits for older women taking up line dancing in Cape Town. Line dancing was 'a fun way to exercise', and a catalyst for other kinds of socialising that went beyond the classes. And in occupational science, this combination of reported social and physical benefits is echoed by Owen-Booth and Lewis (2020). Line dancing seems to prompt different disciplines to arrive at these similar conclusions, where line dancing is an interesting in-between activity offering a range of benefits to regulars – all of which come back to ageing.

Thomas and Cooper (2002), researching a variety of dance practices, find a range of health and social benefits reported by older dancers. They observe: "even those with serious disabilities do not seem disabled when they are dancing. On the contrary, they appear both skilled and full of life and vigour" (ibid: 70). Across the different styles studied, and despite their differences, Thomas and Cooper

describe the ways different groups attach a special meaning to the community-making possibilities of different dance types – sequence dancers celebrating a team-like atmosphere by always being involved, and members of a creative dance class championing a unique action-and-reaction in group performances. Thomas and Cooper gesture at an embodied perspective, but here I will dig in much more – suggesting something exceptional about line dancing at Lynda's classes.

5.2.2 Variations

The mistakes-cum-'variations' at the line dancing club are the most significant unpredictability I am introducing, and benefit from an introduction and some theoretical context.

5.2.2a Three variations

> "I always say 'listen, nobody goes wrong, there's just variations!' [laughs] And it's true, many times we've been talking and dancing at the same time and everybody has turned and we're facing the wrong way and I've gone 'youse have all gone wrong!' [laughs]."

When the line dancing went wrong the evening went right. Sue put it neatly here, that 'nobody goes wrong, there's just variations'. In a way this isn't true – line dancing doesn't champion variations or improvisations of the kind you might associate with other kinds of dancing. But despite this there were a variety of variations at the club. This first bunch I am bracketing as the 'too social' variations.

The more complicated dances involved a variety of turns and steps few could manage mid-conversation. But this didn't stop people from chatting and dancing. A mistake here might mean a couple of people find themselves behind the beat or skipping a step, relatively invisible, or as Sue describes a whole row of people facing the wrong way. This always provoked lots of laughter – especially if Lynda was the one at fault. Mock tellings-off and jokes about memories fading followed these more disorganised moments: 'Oh here we go again!', 'Who hasn't been listening then?!', 'You're losing it … what is my name?!'. Knowing smiles and laughs exchanged those facing the wrong way slipped back in sync. When it was my turn for a variation one or two were quick to quip: 'We're the ones meant to be forgetting things, not you!'

When I started attending Lynda's classes George was waiting for a knee replacement. At the time he

moved gingerly on the floor, favouring his knee and avoiding any quick spins. He wouldn't stick strictly to the routine but always faced the right way and wasn't caught out by any restarts – he knew the dances well even if he couldn't perform them perfectly. When he sat out the quicker dances I took the opportunity for some private tutoring, George helping from his seat at the side.

This continued until George had the operation, after which he wasn't able to attend for a few weeks. When he returned he stuck to one or two dances a night, moving more carefully than before his operation. From his seat he followed along with the steps – moving his legs like a grapevine or box step, if not actually stepping. Over the next few weeks as George's knee improved he danced later into the evening. His variations became less pronounced, and by the time my fieldwork ended he was moving happily and confidently – much to the delight of the group.

Rather than 'too social' or 'too bad knees', my last example is 'too Geoff'. In my first class Geoff very kindly told me not to worry and to follow his lead if I got lost. Geoff's spot on the floor was directly in front of me, and he was to be my lighthouse in the storm. Though his instructions were always accurate, Geoff always telling me ahead of time what steps were coming up, he enjoyed adding his own flair. If a dance had a brush step, here brushing the ball of your foot on the floor while stepping forward, this was always done with a great deal of style and commitment – so much style and commitment it didn't always look like a brush step. If a dance involved stepping for four beats Geoff would add a spin. And when there was a pause Geoff would do some sort of skip. Despite his knowledge and warmth I had to search for other guides on the floor.

> "You just go at your own pace, if you don't get it right it doesn't matter […] You can be in a line and someone in front is doing something different and you're like 'Oh wait what am I supposed to be doing, oh I'm supposed to be doing that', or I'll end up the wrong way round so I'll quickly turn [laughs], put me in the right direction […] Lots are happy to troddle along and go with the flow."
> Cat

> "That's the fun going wrong […] There's no fun in being right all the time is there! [laughs]."
> Kate

Figure 10: *Geoff dancing*

Breaking form was an essential part of the club. A better understanding of this is helped by some theoretical unpacking – 'troddle along', though capturing something of the relaxed feel undersells it with a, one might argue, humility in language absent in high cultural discourses. This theoretical context helps introduce the third and last unpredictability, which I will come to after.

5.2.2b Dancing bodies

Keen to develop an understanding of dance that benefits from work done in cultural geography, Derek McCormack (2008) draws attention to the bodies doing the dancing – not upper case Line Dancing, but people dancing in lines. Rather than thinking of dance as the performance of a particular thing with particular meanings, so thinking in terms of representation, McCormack unsettles a sense of given-ness and obvious purpose: "the politics of dancing or moving are never given in advance […] we do not yet know what bodies can do" (ibid: 1825). Or can't do.

There is a spatial focus here that helps this research. The dancing was changed by a spatial-cultural etiquette, and equally the hall of the working men's club was changed by the dancers – the music, together with the dancers moving in (semi) unison central to any understanding of the qualities of the space. Put neatly: "spaces *are* – at least in part – as moving bodies *do*" (ibid: 1823, emphasis in original). Calling back to the last chapter, this is the kind of thinking Bell (2009) uses to question the publicness of public space.

McCormack uses descriptions of tango to flesh out the theory: "tango is a mobile, travelling movement practice. As such, its cultural meaning and imagined geographies are never stable" (ibid: 1826). And the same is true of line dancing. *Christy Lane's Complete Book of Line Dancing* (Lane, 2000) gives a version of an uncertain history: with its roots in European folk dancing, and following the popularity of 70s disco-style formation dancing in America, the boom for line dancing came with the release of the 1992 Billy Ray Cyrus hit 'Achy Breaky Heart'. Riding on resurgent country-Americana interest through the 80s, the song came with an accompanying line dance routine – the pairing of which introduced and cemented a connection between American country music and line dancing. With interest piqued by films like *Urban Cowboy* in the 80s, the popularity of line dancing piggybacked on the success of the song – which was a hit beyond the USA. Styles and steps were borrowed as the dancing quickly evolved and ultimately established, proving some staying power beyond a potentially faddish music-video-marketing-exercise inception. This cultural-historical narrative omits what is sometimes called 'soul line dancing': 'soul' because of the soul, R&B and hip-hop musical influences rather than country, and also line/square dancing practices in East Asia – there are several videos of groups dancing Lynda's routines in Malaysia and South Korea on Youtube. And Lynda was regularly invited to China to teach classes, where public square dancing is very popular and has its own history (sketched tantalisingly briefly by Zhou, 2014). I can't give a full account of these interesting geographies but I say this to avoid a whitewashing of line dancing practices – and to suggest there is some geography to the American-ness of its roots. But from here or hereabouts line dancing 'travels out'.

The 1999 film *The Best Man* ends with the main characters dancing the Electric Slide to 'Candy' by Cameo. Though the line dance wasn't created for the film or song, the routine originally being set to 'Electric Boogie' by Marcia Griffiths, the closing scene popularised their pairing. Jeffrey Boakye (2019) uses the song-dance combo to illustrate a sense of transatlantic belonging:

> "If the first few notes of the song 'Candy' by Cameo were to suddenly drift out of these pages and filter through the air, I'm certain that most, if not all, black readers would immediately drop the book, spring to their feet and get into formation for the Electric Slide [...] It's just one example of how pervasive Afro-American culture has been for black identity on these [British] shores – and a pretty good metaphor for how we all move to the same rhythm." (ibid: 8)

This nicely illustrates the complex and unsettled meanings of line dancing – the dance, as a 'travelling

movement practice' here meets black British cultures and experiences, affecting a feeling of transatlantic camaraderie. Searching online you can find groups dancing the Electric Slide in full cowboy-style regalia and altogether different scenes at Notting Hill Carnival with 'Candy' playing. Though the steps are the same, the meanings of the Electric Slide are not: the dance always redone in body and space. The dance then has a geography beyond its invention, and beyond any perceived conservatism of the (sometimes) routinised steps.

> "To undertake geographical research into moving, dancing bodies is not only to think *about* these bodies: it also involves thinking with and through the spaces of which these bodies are generative." (McCormack, 2008: 1831, emphasis in original)

The variations at the club are best understood as essential to the quality of the cultural moment – this is a challenge for Banks' (2017) framing. As a geographer McCormack's focus is on the spaces and possibilities of bodies moving, rather than Banks' acknowledgement that given 'patterns of reception' shape our engagement with cultural things. McCormack has a less settled idea of the cultural thing than Banks, so less 'patterns of reception' than 'patterns of doing', and McCormack is also less concerned with a cultural value debate – for better and worse, as it is sometimes hard to know what to do with cultural geography theorising.

What did the variations do? is the interesting question that follows this: what kind of a space did they make? There is though an important difference in thinking here. Rather than *a sovereign subject with given needs who goes dancing*, a cultural geographer might talk instead about *an emergent sense of self in and through dancing*. On the one hand bad knees and hips are hard not to think about in terms of human needs, but then the variations did more than meet needs: they changed the room.

Thinking these together is possible by returning to *Cultural Feelings* (Highmore, 2017). As well as establishing a vocabulary around mood and shared feeling, Highmore also asks: "what moods should we champion as being the most productive or critical? What moods are our 'mood norms' and what does this tell us about the world as it is?" ibid: 42). Highmore draws again on Raymond Williams, and his interest in democracy in feeling as much as thought (ibid: 34). Not in *Cultural Feelings*, referencing an interview with an amateur singer, Highmore shows the value of this style of thinking:

"In a few lines, an informant reveals a world of feelings: of joy, of using his voice, of being with others. What is this feeling? Can we name it? What would Williams have called it? I think he might have called it […] a feeling for democracy. Anyone who sings in a choir, who uses his or her voice 'as a means to be with others', whether in a community choir or a church choir, knows that feeling […] Community choirs might seem like a trivial matter, but in the fostering of democratic taste-feelings they might well be significant." (Highmore, 2016b: 560, 563)

This is the 'emphases' that Williams stresses in his *Culture is Ordinary* essay ([1958] 1989): culture matters because of what it provokes and holds together. So returning to the cultural geographer-cultural value quandary, one might talk about emergent meaning and emergent feeling and the uncertainty of dance, whilst arguing that this emergent thingness is able to meet the needs of a group experiencing ageing together – and in fact change that experience. Rather than democracy, in this chapter I want to argue that the line dancing club became a space of and for solidarity, and that this is worth championing. Understanding how this solidarity arises is important because of what that solidarity meant to the dancers, and more politically, because solidarity is fundamental to a socialist politics – paraphrasing Williams, because it is the best basis for any future society. In this solidarity, ageing was done and experienced differently in ways that went beyond dancing on a Tuesday night. I will do my best to build on this.

5.2.3 Nashville-on-Trent

"To dance is not necessarily to unthinkingly reproduce a given cultural identity: it is also a matter of actively reworking, albeit on a micro-scale, the tangible corporeality of this identity." (McCormack, 2008: 1827)

"I was somewhere when they were asking for pieces of music, and they asked for 'Perfect', whoever sings it, that young feller, and I said 'Ooh we line dance to this'. 'Line dance to this?!', and I said 'We aren't all throwing cowboy hats you know!'. That's what they think it is- Ed Sheeran!"
Vicky

There wasn't a strict country-ness to the club – less Americana than Americana-ish. This ish-ness was evident in one of Lynda's chosen warm up dances. Rocket To The Sun is a beginner routine set to

'What You've Done to Me' by Samantha Jade – a winner of *The X Factor Australia*. After some electronic umming and ahhing the song begins in earnest with the trademark kick drum of the overproduced mid 00s pop-dance era – music that seems to live on in exercise classes. The verse starts: 'Sometimes you get what you want, Sometimes you get what you don't, Sometimes you … get nothing at all'. For me, the song held together early experiences of nightclubs and the one spin class I attended. As the bridge comes and the drums drop out: 'Yooouuu shot your looovvve through my defenccceees'. Not arms around friends on a sticky dancefloor, or wondering when the half-hour of hell would end, but grapevine-ing left and right in a working men's club before a ¾ turn. The drums come crashing back into the chorus with emphatic sing-along production: 'I'm a rocket to the suuunnn, I'm a heartbeat on the ruuunnn'. The lyrics screamed singular release, and the dancing something more communal.

Building on McCormack (2008) this is the last unpredictability I want to highlight: the Americana-ish-ness. This ish-ness was in the modern pop music and also in the working men's club setting. In summer lawn bowlers would often attempt the shortcut through the hall on their way back from the bar, with half-apologetic looks and pint in hand. Lynda would jokingly have a go: 'Oh so you've decided to join us, jump on the end of a row then! Go on, don't be shy!' Any serious attempt at establishing Nashville-on-Trent would be subject to such interruptions. The classes hadn't always been like this though, as Ruby described:

> "When we first started with Lynda we used to go to [a country and western club in Stoke], it had a lovely spring floor and all the flags around, and we used to go on a Saturday night and everyone used to go in their gear, all the ladies in saloon gear and stuff like that. We used to have a shoot-out […] They took it really seriously you weren't allowed to speak when you were doing it or laugh or anything."

With shootouts and full garb this suggests a strictness and subcultural flavour – and meanings much more tied to an Americana imaginary. This is in pretty sharp contrast to a more recent weekend away to Blackpool:

> "We've had different themes. The last one we did was television, and our group went as Downton Abbey […] Can you remember Pavarotti, 'Nessun Dorma'? We did a dance to that. It

was speeded up obviously and it was also lots and lots of turns, you had to have your wits about you to do it. And Lynda came in the room with this big blow up Pavarotti suit on, I've never forgotten it. Every time she did a turn her suit went one way and she went another [laughs], it was just so funny."

Lynda said that even after the country and western venue closed the dancers would turn up to classes in hats and jeans and proper boots. Two decades on comfortable footwear was preferred, and hats were brought out only on special occasions. Ruby gives a glimpse of what the classes used to be like, and the 'reworking' that has gone on since.

Over the last few years Lynda said that most wanted improver level dances rather than anything more technical. And fewer routines were introduced – instead the regulars were happy to go through the dances they were familiar with, plus the odd new one thrown in. The different variations had become more common with more knee and hip replacements and comedy missteps. Lynda linked these changes to getting older. The things people liked about the classes had changed: they liked that they were social, that line dancing was exercise and good for your memory, and that you could go on your own. What the Pavarotti suit and variations did, I want to argue, was escape the strictness of a cultural practice – so that it was and wasn't about the dancing.

Summing up these unpredictabilities: first there were the aerobic and cognitive, as well as aesthetic concerns. The steps were the same but the ways they were valued were not. For Josie there wasn't an easy separation, because dancing as exercise lead to dancing as dancing – all the while dancing. Then the variations, that throw into doubt any already understood meaning of the movements – here the steps did change. What is significant is not just that mistakes were made, but were actively and purposely reunderstood as 'variations'. And lastly the little subversions of a given cultural identity of line dancing, and a sense of ages and changes at the club. Banks (2017) figures unpredictability in 'differing social contexts', but each of these go beyond context and 'patterns of reception': in the ~~aesthetic~~ aerobic codes, in the unpredictability of the cultural thing itself, and in a shift from strictness to looseness in the practice – a collective change in approach. These are more 'patterns of doing'.

Pursuing *What did the variations do?* leads me away from Banks and cultural value. I will argue the variations are better understood as convivial rather than aesthetic gestures, and reflected attitudes and intentions beyond the dancing. In Banks' language, the 'social context' effected the not so set 'properties and powers' of the cultural practice, in not neatly cultural ways. Over the rest of the chapter I will give some shape to these attitudes and intentions and their effects – here the rest of the room comes into focus.

5.3 Convivial gestures

Before making the case that the dancing variations make more convivial than aesthetic sense, I want to entertain the opposite. To better understand the variations I am going to introduce wider context, which is exactly what Theodor Adorno ([1937] 2002) said not to do when making sense of art's 'late works':

> "The maturity of the late works of significant artists does not resemble the kind one finds in fruit. They are, for the most part, not round, but furrows, even ravaged. Devoid of sweetness, bitter and spiny, they do not surrender themselves to mere delectation. They lack all the harmony that the classicist aesthetic is in the habit of demanding from works of art, and they show more traces of history than of growth." (ibid: 564)

It is worth running through this argument as it is a different, and I think still useful way of thinking about culture and ageing, but one I won't make – and the reasons why are important. Adorno found special meaning in Beethoven's late period and late works in general. Beethoven was so significant not because his later works suggest resolution or anything enlightened or newly joyful, but because they are so furrowed and ravaged. Presented with ravaged art, Adorno is critical of aesthetes folding in biography – making some sense of changes in style and form, but in doing so transforming music into document and not art: "it is as if, confronted by the dignity of human death, the theory of art were to divest itself of its rights and abdicate in favour of reality" (ibid: 564). Here the supposed failings and oddities of Beethoven reveal something about the artist's experience, but that is all they do.

Beethoven's late style, jettisoned as it is from any canonical continuity, and at times quite awkward in its poking and prodding at given conventions and expectations, is much more than insight into a

troubled later life: "the caesuras, the sudden discontinuities that more than anything else characterize [sic] the very late Beethoven, are those moments of breaking away; the work is silent at the instant when it is left behind, and turns its emptiness outward" (ibid: 567). Adorno works to make aesthetic sense of these would-be variations, that like the line dancers he won't accept as mistakes: this isn't art failing but art succeeding. Adorno arrives at a conclusion that this late Beethoven is at once subjective and objective: "objective is the fractured landscape [conveyed by the music], subjective the light in which – alone – it glows into life. He does not bring about their harmonious synthesis. As the power of dissociation, he tears them apart in time, in order, perhaps, to preserve them for the eternal. In the history of art late works are the catastrophes" (ibid: 567). Reading Adorno on Beethoven at a distance, Edward Said (2006: 17) suggests: "there is […] an inherent tension in late style that abjures mere bourgeois aging [sic] and that insists on the increasing sense of apartness and exile and anachronism, which late style expresses and, more important, uses to formally sustain itself". So despite the obvious markers of high taste, Adorno is arguing against a sense of bourgeois taste and tasting – and for music and culture that challenges it. Said (2004: np) concludes:

"This is the prerogative of late style: it has the power to render disenchantment and pleasure without resolving the contradiction between them. What holds them in tension, as equal forces straining in opposite directions, is the artist's mature subjectivity, stripped of hubris and pomposity, unashamed either of its fallibility or of the modest assurance it has gained as a result of age and exile."

Despite the unashamed fallibility and lack of pomposity, Lynda's classes were not catastrophes – and there wasn't silence when breaking form. Here Adorno and Said want to reengage a representational argument – for them, Beethoven's own strife and sadness is not the only thing worth appreciating, because this music is able to convey something significant: at once breaking from the restrictions of aesthetic standards, and in the breaking communicate something about ageing and death. Strife may have given birth to it, but the cultural object, here music, is much more than a diary of this – it has a kind of cultural value by telling us something about the end of life.

I also think Lynda's classes have a lot to say about life and ageing, but I will make a different argument. Trying to inhabit a more Adorno-like perspective – though line dancing I am sure would fall foul of Adorno's criticism, like jazz, of uninventive and banal *rhythmic-spatial music* – one might propose that the variations communicate something about ageing. Observing but not involved, they

affect a poetic brokenness. This is working to make some sense of the dancing beyond the room – as McCormack (2008) argues though, dancing is always in and of the room. The clear and obvious difference between Beethoven and the line dancing is the nature of consumption/production: Adorno is not writing about performing Beethoven. But still, the collective performance of 'variations' might communicate in artful style an aged 'fractured landscape' between the dancers? This would be a more aesthetic argument, that comes back in some way to dancing as dance. I want to suggest, however, that the variations were not that kind of dancing.

Rather than the dissolving of form and arriving at something profound, I think a better cultural analogy would be the blooper reel of a film you really like. Blooper reels land best when you know what the actors are meant to be saying or doing – so you can recognise and enjoy the discontinuity. They are spontaneous and are, or at least always packaged as, joyful outbursts. If you've seen the film enough, and are maybe even invested in some way in the actors playing those favourite characters, the effect is one of familiarity. You get to enjoy watching it go wrong, but in going wrong there is something else (joyful) going right. The blooper reel isn't part of the film, and so isn't trying to tell a story or evoke mood or achieve poignancy in the same way – it is doing something else. Unlike Beethoven, Lynda and the dancers were doing something else: the variations making another kind of sense. While there was sometimes a lack of harmony in movement, there were other kinds of harmony between the dancers.

In a wonderfully generous and curious paper, Eric Laurier and Chris Philo (2006) lean into their privilege as academics: "[attending] carefully and patiently to spatial phenomena" (ibid: 194). There is some shared ground with McCormack: "we would like to shift from […] the concreteness and intelligibility of specific gestures with place as their backdrop to a greater emphasis on how gestures themselves give us a feel for places" (ibid: 199). Throughout they are in dialogue with a dour Goffman. They share a view that actions and gestures give something away about a space, and are actively involved in the making of that space, but Laurier and Philo are more optimistic – or they at least entertain the possibility of something more optimistic:

> "For Goffman, gestures are a continuing problem besetting his impression-managers in public […] When they are not potentially embarrassing us, Goffman's gestures – as they are made by unwitting members of the public in public places such as streets, bars and cafés – give off unintended signals that con-artists and police officers can read as disclosing hidden motives. Yet, what Goffman misses is the involvement of gestures in events, places and other matters

that are concerned with giving ourselves away in a more 'positive' sense, affirmative of something more than *just* a self-interested management of impressions." (ibid: 202, emphasis in original)

In Goffman's world gestures reveal 'darker truths': "people only want to *appear* happy to have you around, and their concern is more deeply with (their) appearance than with matters such as conviviality or hospitality" (ibid: 200, emphasis in original). Rather than just appearing, I feel confident saying the regulars at the line dancing club were happy to have each other around.

For Laurier and Philo conviviality is not a neatly wrapped up concept: "schools of research that begin with definitions of conviviality can always find fault […] for failing to live up to their version of what it ought to be" (ibid: 194). They are interested in 'as it happens' conviviality:

"We are led to an interest in how people in particular places inhabit them *with* others whose responses, including sanctions of various kinds, cannot but reveal the success or failure of someone's efforts at behaving appropriately […] We suspect that it is against the background of a locally built and locally historicized organization [sic] of normality that something we might conceptualize [sic] as sociability or conviviality is *enacted* in any given setting." (ibid: 195, emphasis in original)

A 'locally built and locally historicised organisation of normality' speaks to the wrong-rightness of the dancing. It would be misleading to suggest the classes were chaotic, though. Certain kinds of mistakes were 'sanctioned' as variations, to borrow from Laurier and Philo – though sanctioned feels a bit judicial, I will say accommodated.

Laurier and Philo's analysis benefits from slowing down socialising. They observe in a café a toddler spilling a drink. The mother of the toddler gets up to get some napkins, and someone at another table holds the toddler's gaze and smiles warmly to help distract while the mum is away. Someone else in the café spots the spill and doubles back to fetch more napkins, and comments that this happens with their grandchild all the time. This becomes an 'integrative' event through a succession of actions and gestures, that in their doing reveal something about the space. Café dwellers practised a responsibility for their environment, even as customers: "the gestures that we make […] go beyond

expressing feelings and intentions [...] since they help to provide the place with its receptivity, indeed its conviviality" (ibid: 204). In this slowing down Laurier and Philo see the significance of responsive gestures as well as the gestures that initiate the action.

Slowing down a typical 'too social' variation at the club: two dancers were having a conversation while dancing. A restart was coming – the routine breaking from the established looping set of steps to match the song's transition to a bridge. Lynda said 'Restart coming' to signal this, and 'Aaand restart' on the beat. The majority of the room stayed facing the stage per Lynda's instructions. The two dancers having a conversation did a half turn to face the back, missing the restart. They each cried out 'Whoops!', laughing and quickly turning back to face the front. Lynda shouted 'I saw that girls!' from the stage. The two looked and laughed at each other. Another dancer shouted 'It's not a social club you know!' and the room laughed along. This wasn't said with malice – it was pantomime-ish. The dancer who shouted out smiled over at the two and they smiled back. Lynda, this time through the mic, said 'I'll be watching youse' with a wink. Though the language is cold this helps unpack the warmth of the club.

Building on McCormack, 'bodies are generative' in their disharmony, and important here were the harmonising smiles and laughs and jokes. And this is a good way of thinking about the variations: a harmony being different notes that complement each other. Revisiting the 'too bad knees/hips' variations: there was a group of three dancers who occupied the space nearest the stage. All were in their 80s and picky with the routines they danced, preferring to save themselves for the familiar favourites. Like George their variations were subtle – always keeping to pace without always sticking to script. But these variations did not provoke panto-like outbursts and soft scoldings. The accommodating gestures were, collectively, not commenting on them – 'nobody goes wrong, there's just variations' was an ethos that was performed differently.

Shifting from a more aesthetic to convivial understanding helps unpack *What did the variations do?*, making clear a combination of action and reaction. The collective responses, that harmonised disharmony, reflected and also manifested an 'organisation of normality' at the club. Thinking more convivially helps attend to the variations as the stuff of analysis, rather than an interruption of the dancing – the assumed (cultural) stuff. There are glimpses of this convivial 'organisation of normality' at work – in the lively exchanges and in understanding aches and pains. This combination of liveliness and understanding is the *going right* bit of *when the dancing went wrong the evening went right*. Laurier and Philo stop short of saying the convivial café is valuable, beyond suggesting that there is a

'geography of kindness' worth exploring. The kindness at the line dancing club had important effects, though – I still want to argue that this kindness mattered. The 'too Geoff' variations remain undertheorised, beyond saying that everyone seemed to enjoy Geoff enjoying himself – Geoff perhaps was more like Beethoven, though less catastrophic.

Like Laurier and Philo, and McCormack, Alan Radley (1995) is interested in movement and gesture in a non-representational sense – that is, recognising the meaning of movement in the moment, rather than thinking movement a kind of sign language that can be already understood. Like McCormack, dance is a neat example: "from the perspective put forward here, dance can […] be considered as the fabrication of a 'different world' of meaning, made with the body" (ibid: 12). This is a lot like McCormack's interest in 'the spaces of which these bodies are generative'. Radley though stresses the link between these 'imaginary worlds' and the rest of life:

> "However, what collective performances make possible is not just the maintenance of imaginary worlds, as if these stood apart from everyday 'reality'. This sets apart the virtual from the real, when the whole point of such activities is that they can be experienced as more real, more vital than the mundane sphere. In effect, such liminoid activities, play or ritual, have their continuing significance because of the way that they mirror the remainder of life. (More precisely, because of how the remainder of life is refracted through them.)" (ibid: 14)

'How the remainder of life is refracted through them' is key. In Mark Rimmer's (2010) research on 'new monkey', an up-tempo MC-driven music type specific to the North East of England, the link is clear between music and dance and 'the remainder of life': "the *musical habitus* […] both issue from, as well as help perpetuate, local historical cultural values (rooted in solidarity, shared experience, mutual support), as well as offering strategies for negotiating some of the shared problems (for example, poverty, boredom and stigma) based in the structural conditions which affected them equally" (ibid: 246, emphasis in original). 'Musical habitus' is Rimmer's way of capturing this sense of music and performance coming together with people and place, where the significance of new monkey to young people can only be understood through these wider contexts and histories. Angela McRobbie (1993) is similarly keen to tie music and dance to 'the remainder of life', thinking through the ways femininity is negotiated at raves – and reading changes in laddish attitudes, new feminisms that shun dance as an act of courtship, and an ambient AIDS panic in which young people seek different kinds of connection. 'How the remainder of life is refracted through them' is where this

chapter heads next, like these examples, where dancing is perhaps uniquely able to conjure these 'imaginary worlds'. And again, I am returning to the importance of understanding culture in two ways.

5.4 Dancing alone together

Figure 11: *Seats at the side of the hall*

> "I could walk in the gym and say good morning to folks and how are you and that but you don't sit down and have a talk to anybody. Whereas here if there's a dance you don't like or a piece of music you don't like, you can always sit out and go talk to somebody [...] The beauty about line dancing is you don't need a partner, so if you've lost your partner you can go along- there's always somebody who's going to talk to you, it's the most friendly sort of dancing I think, there's not many occard [awkward] sods!"
> David

Suzi had started attending Lynda's classes with a friend. She had tried line dancing before but not enjoyed it: "I didn't like line dancing because everybody looked down at their feet". Lynda's classes were different:

> "I come on me own now, but you never feel alone either here because lots of people come

here on their own. Everyone chats to you anyway so, it's just a very friendly outing.

I mean where else can you go on your own? You can go the theatre but no one would talk to you would they? You'd just go in and come out I suppose […] If you are on your own, I mean I'm not [widowed] but for anybody on their own […] It's so valuable, otherwise they'd do nothing, they'd just feel that they can't join in on anything cos you need a partner or they wouldn't make you welcome. You shouldn't feel alienated or- even if you're shy you can come in here. Even if you don't talk to somebody they'll talk to you. So that's valuable isn't it?"

Whatever cultural value frame you might want to employ, theatre failed Suzi's own *how good is it on your own* assessment – like John on darts and football. Like Suzi, Dawn didn't start line dancing at Lynda's classes. After her dad died, and when she started taking on more caring responsibilities for her mum, Dawn was looking for a release. She had started line dancing 20 years prior, and for the last 10 years had been a regular at Lynda's classes:

"She's [Lynda] brilliant, a lot better than anyone else I've ever been to. She's funny, full of energy, she's the same age as me [laughs] but you know I haven't got the energy she's got, and she just- you look forward to coming, and you just feel better when you've been.

It's the chance to sort of dress up and go out, instead of being stuck in the house watching the telly. It just … passes the week on, I just love it […] I know a lot of the people are old age pensioners but there's a few young ones, but mostly older people I suppose, just a lovely crowd, very friendly. And if anybody's got a problem there's always somebody to help or talk to, it's [better than] paying a psychologist, psychiatrist whatever for therapy, just come here and have a line dance!"

Years before Dawn would go ballroom dancing with her husband, but over time had lost his love for it and become much more reclusive: "I knew he was busy working and I had the children, and he just didn't want to go out anymore, but this is something you can do on your own. You come on your own or with a friend like I do, it's something that you can do". She went on:

"I've met a lot of friends, I come with Fay who's me best friend, who I met through the line dancing, it's a social thing as well, cos me husband he doesn't like going out, he avoids parties and anything he can get out of going to he does, so this is for me. I've had 2 children and they're grown up, so I shouldn't feel guilty because it's something- I looked after me Mum I looked after me Dad, and er, this is my time. I've got a big birthday this year, we've just had Ruby wedding anniversary at the weekend, and I'm 70 in October, so it's time for me."

Kate, who was one of the best dancers at the club, showed a convivial rather than aesthetic sensibility when encouraging along a new dancer:

"A lady came once and she was absolutely useless, she only lived very near where the class was, but every week I went and fetched her and I took her home every week because I thought she just loved the company so much, cos she hadn't got a lot of other company, and she loved it and she was a rubbish dancer, sorry- but she got no rhythm, but she just loved and I thought it's shame for her not to come, to be part of that little class really."

In Kate's words, she then got a boyfriend and lost interest. Kate suggested more broadly: "as you get older you seem to drop things off don't you, one time [we] were doing aerobics all the rest of it and dance even, years and years ago". After this dropping away, a friend pointed her to Lynda, but: "[my friend] only went along three or four weeks and she stopped going, so I thought 'Oh no what I'm going to do, am I going to go on me own?', which is horrible in't it when you don't know anybody at first, but I thought 'Go on you're going have to' cos I enjoyed it so much, and I'm really glad that I stuck it out and carried on going so yeah, it's brilliant […] It's nice if they just say 'Hiya how are ye?', it's that in't it, just being part of that in't it, everybody has a little natter. Does it ye good, gets you out yourself a couple times a week which is good I think".

The club was somewhere lots of the regulars started on their own but found friends. Kate and the dancers were all keenly aware of the special significance of line dancing as a partnerless dance. Katherine first tried line dancing 20 years earlier:

"There was a guy called 'The Urban Cowboy' who came to me son's school to do a demonstration. And I wasn't even going to join in, but I was watching them dance and someone said 'Come on join in', and I got a shopping bag in one hand and my son's violin in the other and I was trying to line dance, and I thought 'Oh I like this!' [laughs]."

Katherine found out about Lynda's classes and had been a regular attendee since: "I've always said if I pop me clogs while I'm dancing, let the dance finish and just dance round me [laughs], don't stop the dance, don't stop the dance". More than the dancing, it was the way Lynda ran the classes that Katherine enjoyed:

"I don't know what we'll do if Lynda stops, we'll er, we'll … I couldn't go anywhere else, cos Lynda's got a style, and David they have a laugh, bit of fun, well you know what they're like they're good fun, yeah it is important. Whoever takes the class they have to be approachable, and Lynda will come round and speak to everybody say 'You alright', as you know, she is patient she is good. She is a bit of a fruitcake [laughs]."

At the time of our interview it was 12 months since Katherine's husband had died:

"I mean to be honest, a week after my husband died, on the Wednesday me friend Sharon said 'You're going line dancing', and I said 'No I'm not', and they said 'Yes you are, and if you haven't got your boots on at half past 7 we're coming and dragging you out, you're coming line dancing, that's where your friends are that's where you need to be'. And if I hadn't have come that first week I probably never would have come back. And I said too, I said 'Don't say you're *sorry*', all I want you to say to me is 'We're glad you're here'. And I made Lynda tell everybody that, and that's what everybody did, they came and said 'Ooh we're glad you're here', 'We're glad you've come'. Nobody said anymore, and that was good for me that.

We've got a few people here that have lost partners. An y'know they all still keep coming, because where your friends are, and your friends understand here. If I run away crying

they're not going to say what's up with me, they're going to know. They don't judge.

It's friends getting together, all these people here I didn't know any of them before I started coming here and dancing […] You can walk in and go sit with anybody. Well you know, you can just go plonk yourself anywhere and you know that don't ye, and everybody's been dead friendly. Whether it's Stoke people I don't know, we are friendly."

Again, Stokie social capital – would the posh knobs have ruined it? Like Katherine, Caroline had also been dancing with Lynda for 20 years:

"I had seen it done [line dancing], and I thought 'Yes it looks quite good', but I wouldn't have thought 'Oh I must go and do that', it was just somebody who just sort of nudged me in the right direction and said 'Come with me'. And I can always remember standing on the floor when I first started, oh I was hopeless, absolutely hopeless, and I said 'Oh I'll never get this, never get this', and she said 'One day it'll just click, and you'll wonder why you struggled'."

And it did click. Caroline was nudged to try line dancing after her husband died:

"It was the saving of me at the time. It was something that I could look forward to do for me- I didn't need anybody to, have a partner for it or anything like that.

The social side of it is you meet people, you talk about what you've been up to in the week, or if you've had a problem you can normally discuss it and sort of say 'Oh I haven't enjoyed that', and she'll say 'Tomorrow's another day, put it to one side, you enjoy your dancing tonight and cope with that tomorrow'. And I really really do enjoy the social side of it.

I would just say I enjoy doing it, when I was at a very low point, I've made some good friends, a good social life as well as the dancing. You don't have to dance if you don't want to, that's what I would say about it basically. I wouldn't say there's any life changing stories attached to it."

For Katherine and Caroline line dancing became a tool in grief – the classes a space to grieve and be helped in grief. 'It was the saving of me' yet 'no life changing stories'. Across both case studies, this is the best and most meaningful illustration of the 'it's not just the darts/dancing' sentiment, and shows why it is worth taking that sentiment seriously. During my fieldwork one of the partners of the regulars died. Brendan's wife used to come to the classes but hadn't for some time due to illness. Lynda made an announcement at the start of one class informing everyone and passing on funeral details. She said Brendan wouldn't be coming for a few weeks. Lots were quick to offer help with shopping or anything else he might need.

When Brendan did come back he didn't dance at first. He sat in his usual seat and watched, nursing a pint, and while the dancing was going on a steady trickle of regulars stopped to sit and have a quick chat with him, not staying too long and presumably not saying too much. Lynda didn't make an announcement saying 'Welcome back' or anything. Brendan being back went unsaid but was certainly noticed, and the feel of his first couple of classes back was markedly different. The collective care and understanding that Katherine described was evident, in knowing what to do and what not to do – grief was painfully familiar.

Returning to the contradictions of the everyday helps to understand this, where tremendous need was met in a quiet way. The working men's club hall was a familiar and unassuming place for the regulars, and the habit of going dancing part of everyday, or every-week routine. Losing a partner though was devastating and anything but everyday – the ultimate shattering of routine, now making cups of tea for one and watching TV alone. These experiences could hardly be described as everyday, but the manner in which grief was met might be. Katherine describes being understood in grief – a group of dancers who understood her experience and were able to take some of the burden away, and the group on the whole knowing what was right to hear and say. This was evident especially in Brendan's first few classes back, where losing a partner was not unexpected and nor were the challenges that come with it. Because line dancing was something you could do on your own, and because most of the dancers were of that age, the club was witness to and familiar with grief in its many forms.

Highmore (2016a) writes that death is both the start and end of culture. Death is not cultural – dying is biological and final. And yet when someone dies and we are dealing with death, we are thrown into

a world of cultured understandings and practices:

> "Culture tells us how to deal with death, what rituals to perform, what ceremonies to arrange. It tells that it is alright to be sad, to cry, to be mournful. It gives us a choice of ways of disposing of a body. *It edges around us*, showing us how to behave, how to think, but our actuality exceeds it. Culture seeks to reabsorb our experiences within its sometimes lively, sometimes sclerotic forms, and to some extent it will always do this. But the singularity of life will always provide moments when culture falls away." (ibid: 136, emphasis added)

Highmore writes very convincingly about death being an end and beginning for cultural meaning. Losing someone is always unique, and yet grieving and living with death is deeply cultural: culture 'edges around us'. The culture that edged around the dancers was valuable when it was most needed.

Here it is worth returning to Radley (1995), and the significant connections between an 'imaginary dance world' and life beyond the dancing. The club was not a world apart from the realities of getting older – the classes were full of those realities. Crucially, these realities are what made up the thingness of the dancing and the thingness of the club. While opening up questions of cultural taste, Highmore (2016b) describes taste as 'unfinished', and this is explained with reference to a prized piece of music: "Coltrane's record [*Olé*] is still working on me, unfurling itself, offering itself up as an explanation of how a piece of music might constitute one long crescendo without getting any louder or faster" (ibid: 561). The complexity and subtleties of this relationship is what makes it unfinished, in ageing and reengaging with cultural objects. But imagine that object, or here activity changed with you – so taste is doubly unfinished? And this all born of life beyond the dancing?

Rather than just say a taste for line dancing was unfinished, I want to suggest that it was usefully unfinished – even essentially unfinished. Dawn found line dancing at a time of difficulty – having lost a parent and now looking after the other. Line dance classes offered some much-needed respite from this. And more recently, with her kids grown up and despite her husband's reluctance, here was something that allowed her to embrace *her time* in life. We can read here how Dawn's relationship to the dancing changed over time, and how important this was. But for Katherine especially, we can read the importance of the classes losing their strictness – where understanding in grief became the focus.

Crucially then, how were the classes able to change? Under the next header I will suggest this has to do with closeness built up over time, but it also had a lot to do with the working men's club hall. As well as puncturing an Americana affect, the setting and the abundant seating allowed the classes to change and find their thingness. For one, it gave the dancers a chance to rest – lasting over two hours, none of the dancers stayed on the floor for the whole evening. So without truncating the classes to the half-hour many danced for, the evenings kept their intimacy. George's seat-dancing was only possible because of the setting, and glancing back at the LineDanceDallas5 tutorials (Figure 9), George's post-op bopping would not be possible there. And Brendan finding his way back into the dancing needed this – being able to be a part without being apart. Returning to the idea of 'social infrastructure': "social infrastructure draws attention to the affordances that particular spaces or facilities offer for inhabitation and social interaction" Latham and Layton, 2019: 5). What is so interesting and compelling, and yet confounding about Lynda's classes, it seems to me, is their complex assemblage: of the right dance in the right space with the right shared history and the right teacher, and the chance of this.

But sticking with social infrastructure, like in the darts league, finding and keeping the space was an issue. Lynda had moved around different working men's clubs and village halls over the last 20 years, with different venues closing: "there's always an issue finding venues, it's always an issue. Cos we have to have somewhere big enough for amount of dancers that we have. But it is an issue- if they shut it isn't easy, when [the working men's club] was flooded it wasn't easy getting somewhere else, so we had a lot of time off". My sense was that the club had grown with its setting – taking new shape because of the space it found itself in. While much of this chapter has focused on the dancing, and reading this with an eye on embodiment and space-making, the space also made the practice: the refashioned classes demanding a particular kind of space. The culture that 'edged around' the dancers, paraphrasing Highmore, was decidedly spatial. More than just social, an idea of cultural infrastructure is needed here – rewording Lathan and Layton: 'drawing attention to the affordances that particular spaces or facilities offer for [cultural practice]'. If a taste for line dancing was unfinished, so too was the working men's club space.

5.5 Conviviality and similarity

Before introducing 'cultural democracy' as a possible policy solution, I want to revisit the discussion around conviviality and care. The way Laurier and Philo (2006) think conviviality shares something with the sociological literature discussed in the last chapter. They emphasise the messiness of living

together while trying to make sense of that mess. And the focus on time and space works to ground sociability its specific contexts. They are not, though, wrestling with modern failures in multiculturalism and sustained nativist sentiments. Like the darts, the line dancing club did not reflect any kind of unruly racial diversity, but there was something unruly here that is worth expanding on – as suggested in the last chapter, there was little unruly about darts in Stoke.

Returning to Gilroy, he describes conviviality as 'emancipatory interruptions': "the banality of intermixture and the subversive ordinariness of [Britain's] convivial cultures in which 'race' is stripped of meaning and racism, as it fades, becomes only an after-effect of long-gone imperial history rather than a sign of Europe's North American destiny" (2004: 166). This banal mixing destabilises the fixity of identification: "the radical openness that brings conviviality alive makes a nonsense of closed, fixed, and reified identity and turns attention toward the always-unpredictable mechanisms of identification" (ibid: xi).

'Subversive ordinariness' is a great and useful phrase, and I think captures something of the way grief was done at the club. And while it wasn't race that was stripped of its meaning at the club, ageing perhaps was – or at least its meaning changed. Across different examples in this chapter so far, expectations of ageing were subverted at the club: a failing memory was something you could joke and laugh about, and the same with changing and ageing bodies. And not just laughter, but more importantly these things were accepted and understood in nuanced and careful ways. Losing a partner was something that while awful and painful, wasn't a thing the regulars went through on their own – it wasn't hidden. This wasn't a conviviality of difference, it was a conviviality that came from similarity and shared experience. The variations are an excellent example of this.

As well as being invited to teach abroad, Lynda had been approached several times to run classes in different leisure centres and fitness clubs around Stoke. She had turned them all down, though – the timeslots being too short, and the spaces and the finances not quite working. Making enough money from the classes used to be a major concern – Lynda and David used to run a pottery business, and the classes gave them 'a little pocket money'. But when that business went downhill, Lynda and David put all their efforts into the classes and they became their sole income. Luckily they always had the numbers, and because of this they had been able to keep prices affordable – since they got their pensions they had never put prices up, being financially stable and knowing the importance of the classes to the regulars. This was all helped by having a good relationship with the working club committee, who were able to manage the rent and make sure the classes could continue. After

dancing together for so long, and forming such strong relationships, for Lynda and David the classes were a social event just like for the attendees.

The classes were a delicate balance. As well as introducing the right amount of new dances, and keeping the old favourites, the club held a fine social balance. Lynda hinted at this when describing how dancers liked their seats and spaces on the floor, and the potential for tension if that routine was disrupted. Lynda didn't want to start a new beginner class, at least in part, because it might unsettle the dynamics – the settled unsettled-ness, this the particular wrong-rightness of the dancing, did not arrive in a hurry. So while the 'difficult full space' and 'original full time' were vital, this was not always inclusive. During my year with the dancers, three new arrivals struggled to integrate – these three were, in fact, who Lynda was referring to when she described the seating conflicts. At the start of each class Lynda would go through a couple of very entry level dances – dances the regulars could do in their sleep, and that many wouldn't get on the floor for. But after that the difficulty ramped up, and pre-dance explanations got quicker and less helpful for beginners.

One problem with this research is that I didn't interview people who left the club, like Kate's friend. The three dancers, who struggled to get the hang of the routines, found their space at the back of the hall. Their 'variations', that were more to do with not knowing what was going on, did not feel part of the room like those described earlier – no obvious expression of warmth following them. Are they still dancing with Lynda now? In the last chapter I described the limits of care and conviviality in the darts scene, but here it seems, with more at risk, those limits seem more necessary. Yes, the posh knobs might have ruined the atmosphere at The Brown Bear, but the stakes seem higher when Brendan is returning to the club for the first time – where he needed to be met with a deep understanding. Knowing this, it is understandable why Lynda would not want to introduce newcomers to the group. Coming back to *The Care Manifesto*: "to encourage promiscuous care means building institutions that are capacious and agile enough to recognise and resource wider forms of care at the level of kinship" (2020: 44). As an institution, the club was certainly agile in its sometimes-rejection of dance form and its convivial turn, but how capacious was it? And, more to the point, was it necessarily not that capacious – the settled unsettledness being vital? This does however limit, or at least complicate the more political argument I am coming to.

It is worth returning to smallness here, as this is really a question of the limits of smallness. Bell and Jayne (2006) write: "[smallness] it's about ways of acting, self-image, the sedimented structures of feeling, sense of place and aspiration. You are only as small as you think you are" (ibid: 5). The first

thing worth picking up is 'sedimented'. Sedimented, as briefly described in Chapter 2, here refers to the kinds of attachments that are deeply rooted in people and place but in some way forgotten or outside a mainstream. While *deeply rooted* does seem to capture some of the closeness of the dancers, the changing of dance form suggests something more 'emergent'. Rather than sedimented, emergent as used by Williams (1977) refers to the new affects and meanings that bubble up in a culture: "by 'emergent' I mean [...] that new meaning and values, new practices, new relationships and kinds of relationship are continually being created" (ibid: 123). My point here is that small cities are capable of generating cultural meanings that aren't just sedimented, as it seems easy to think of Stoke, but also new and even innovative dance practices – and with it 'new meaning and values, new kinds of relationship'. This is what I mean by the unruliness of Lynda's classes, against the -ruliness of darts in Stoke – the same place, and even the same space, but also something very different.

From a socialist perspective, here comes a difficult question though: naturally wanting to support and expand practices and institutions that offer this different way of doing things, but without losing the specialness of the things being championed. In effect, wanting something for everyone, but recognising that everyone can't have that something – because then it might stop being that something. This is a difficult question that I don't have a full answer for, but I will suggest under the next header that one way forward is to champion the kinds of conditions under which these practices emerge: the difficult full space and time.

5.6 Cultural democracy

Having started with Banks' (2017) cultural justice argument, now at the end of this chapter I want to finish with another – and express a final tension. The discussion in this chapter has evolved: having opened with a cultural value argument that aims to reclaim and restate the objective value of cultural objects, the particularities of Lynda's classes have broadened that value question. If the line dance club has a story, and this chapter has a story, it is about a practice that changed over time – and crucially was able to change. Here I conclude with a cultural value argument that champions a changing and democratic cultural ideal.

In their vision of 'cultural democracy', Nick Wilson, Jonathan Gross and Anna Bull (2017) imagine a different cultural norm – that shares something with Williams' democratising aspirations. It is a compelling one: they imagine all people having access to forms of creativity, and not only in designated arts spaces, but in neighbourhood contexts that feel connected to communities. Not only

accessing culture, Wilson, Gross and Bull want all people making and developing, should they chose to, their own culture: "a world of opportunities to *create* – where everyone has substantial and sustained choices about what to do, what to make, what to be; with everyone drawing freely on their own powers and possibilities; their (individual and collective) experiences, ideas and visions" (ibid: 3, emphasis in original). This is their vision of cultural democracy, and reads like seizing the means of cultural production – though not quite torches and pitchforks seizing.

Wilson, Gross and Bull highlight the distinction between cultural democracy and 'democratising culture' – so not 'taking great art to the people' (ibid: 23). Touring the canon has been the popular response to damning statistics around state-sponsored cultural uptake in more marginal communities (Taylor, 2016), but it is a mistake – failing to recognise the need for forms of culture that connect much more with different groups. Instead: "cultural democracy, by contrast […] is when everyone has the power (whether or not they choose to exercise it) to pursue and realise cultural creativity, thereby co-creating versions of culture" (ibid). In not buying into a cultural deficit logic, this might sound a lot like 'everyday participation', but Wilson, Gross and Bull want something more transformative:

> "There is a danger that critiques of the deficit model that stress what is already taking place (outside of publicly funded cultural organisations) do not go far enough. They risk being constrained by current limits on everyday creativity, describing what is possible *now* – subject to existing social conditions and institutions. We need to go further in understanding the creative *potential* that is present but not yet exercized [sic], and which could be if things were different." (ibid: 19, emphasis in original)

Insisting darts and Waterworld is cultural participation risks affirming a status quo – there may be nothing wrong with Waterworld, but 'things could be different'. Like Banks, Wilson, Gross and Bull see cultural engagement, in its many forms, as essential to human flourishing. Here they mobilise Martha Nussbaum's (2011) 'capabilities approach' to suggest that, rather than popular indicators of societal success like GDP, we need new measures and different standards that are rooted in an idea of human dignity – and these ideas should ground a more progressive cultural policy that understands culture as a right rather than a privilege or accessory. In *Why Music Matters* (2013), Hesmondhalgh spends much longer wrestling with Nussbaum in developing a critical defence of a cultural form. Hesmondhalgh helps move beyond any sense that Nussbaum's chosen cultural examples render the argument classist, here writing persuasively about Candi Stanton's 'Young Hearts Run Free' rather

than Nussbaum on Mahler, and argues that meaningful musical experiences go so much beyond 'self-cultivation' – music can be intensely sociable, and be an engine for empathy and understanding beyond too narrow experiences of the world. Like Banks, perhaps the difficulty here is the scope of the attempted argument for cultural democracy, but the thrust of these arguments are similar – and with a particular focus on the conditions for a better cultural scene.

As suggested, there were various points during my fieldwork where I marvelled at the chance of the dance classes. But of course it wasn't really chance: the classes succeeded, and succeeded in changing because it was able to – or to use the language of this literature, because Lynda and the regulars were able and capable. Wilson, Gross and Bull (2017) make a number of recommendations, one of which is particularly relevant: "[to] investigate the best institutional arrangements through which to promote cultural capabilities for everyone" (ibid: 56). Here, the arrangement was a long-standing one, and as I have tried to argue, one that demanded the difficult full space and original full time. And significantly, one that had been helped by the working men's club committee and Lynda and David finding financial stability. In various ways the dance classes were precarious – and they shouldn't have been.

Steven Hadley (2018) has several gripes with this idea of cultural democracy, and chief among is the failure to engage with a more radical history – while Wilson, Gross and Bull may seem to champion seizing the means of cultural production, they do not seem concerned with the other means of production, or want to name the kind of politics that is opposed to cultural democracy. For Hadley, this rendering is too watered down. Hadley references Owen Kelly ([1984] (2016), who in defining an idea of cultural democracy is more explicitly political: "along with the demand for cultural democracy must come the demands for economic democracy, industrial democracy and political democracy. In each of these spheres, and in many others, we should demand the freedom of citizens rather than the 'rights' of consumers" (ibid: 153). This is decentralisation of cultural production, but with harder point: to develop an 'oppositional cultural movement', one not muddied by ideological compromise in where it gets its funding, that is part of realising something beyond capitalism and beyond cultural hierarchies – these the enemies of change. Inarguably, this is less watered down.

This all leads back to the big question: where is the politics in culture? Is it *everything for everyone* socialism, or the excavating and celebrating of cultural forms that feel particularly socialist? Both seem like good ideas – though one seems far more workable in a public policy context as it stands. Highmore (2010) reflects on this problem of politics when engaging in the messy world of aesthetics and experience: "a commitment to descriptive entanglement is hard to sustain for long and harder

still to shape into something approaching academic conclusions. But if the academic payoff for social aesthetics might seem, at times, ambiguous and uneven, the political utility of such an approach must seem even more dubious" (ibid: 135). In this chapter I have at points lost myself in 'descriptive entanglement', and while maybe generating some 'wonderfully fleshy sociology' as Highmore describes (ibid: 135), where to go with it? Like earlier, Highmore looks to something like choirs: "you could imagine such an approach politicizing [sic] school dinners in a way that wasn't simply dedicated to the instrumentalism of nutrition, but oriented to the communicative pedagogy of multicultural food. This would be a modest, everyday politics, a politics of the gut as much as the mind, *oriented more toward ethos than eidos*" (ibid: 136, emphasis added).

Ethos and eidos is another useful frame, eidos meaning a more logical thought-habit of what a thing is and does – this the instrumental versus more expansive idea of school dinners – and ties back to the cultural geographer-cultural value problem. But ethos and eidos are already *descriptively entangled* in this chapter: line dancing was brain-training and weight-bearing, and these understandings emerged from an ethos of shared ageing and solidarity and compassion. It is difficult to separate ethos and eidos here. In the darts discussion I erred more on the eidos side – Sayer's (2011) idea of 'commitments' more like an extension of eidos beyond nutrition, which is of course important. But in this chapter the question of ethos is more central – and it is a more difficult question.

On *everything for everyone* or socialist ethos, Williams seems to express both in *Culture is Ordinary* ([1958] 1989): "there, as always, is the transformative energy, and the business of the socialist intellectual is what it always was: to attack the clamps on that energy […] and to work in his [sic] own field on ways in which that energy, as released, can be concentrated and fertile" (ibid: 18). Williams is critical but hopeful – and happy to name the political challenges. Yes, radically democratise culture, give it the difficult full space and original full time, but in this democratising something socialist might emerge – like the solidarity of the line dance club. It is important to recognise Williams' deeper sense of democracy, beyond a strategy – and he seems to think both of these socialisms together. From this we might ask: does cultural democracy beat the drum of democratic practice and possibilities, as much as champion a democratic attitude to what it is that people like to do? Is this an important distinction? Lynda's classes suggest so.

Here is a final argument: justice for the difficult full space and original full time. And it makes a good conclusion. But Banks' argument is still persuasive – and here is a final tension. To close, here are two reflections on line dancing in other settings. At the end of this chapter it seems important to ask: could the thingness of the club have happened anywhere else, doing something else? I should say

'Maybe', but I want to say: 'No!'

5.6.1 Dancing in lines

Two lonely summers ago, like many others I watched with excitement and hope as Black Lives Matter protests boomed on both sides of the Atlantic. I was especially moved, and academically interested in the videos and images popping up on Twitter of groups line dancing at these protests. In the UK and the US, The Electric Slide and Cupid Shuffle were being performed by protesters holding signs demanding racial justice and a more equal society – stepping and skipping with banners reading 'I AM NOT A THREAT' and 'JUSTICE FOR GEORGE FLOYD'. These bodies, in the political context of rampant nationalism and normalised police brutality, moved joyfully and defiantly in solidarity against the status quo.

When my best friend got married I was tasked with only a few jobs, one of which was picking some line dances and making sure the DJ had the right music. My friend is an excellent dancer, as is her (now) husband and as are many of their friends, but after the first dance they wanted to encourage everyone to get involved – grandparents and all. They thought, rather than the stuttering start to wedding dancing that requires at least some of the attendees to be sufficiently drunk, that some organisation was required. So on the wedding day a few key people were prepped with the steps. As the first dance wound down and everyone clapped, a few of us sprung up and assembled on the floor, and my friend and her husband coaxed everyone out their chairs. The music started, and my friend shouted to follow the few of us that knew the steps – we had all spread out and I, being particularly tall, was strategically placed in the middle so as many people as possible could see. It took until the second verse for most to get the general idea, but by the end many had it down and everyone seemed to be enjoying themselves. A short while later the song went back on, and everyone jumped back up to give it another go.

Banks (2017) insists that while cultural practices are always unpredictable, there is something in the 'aesthetic codes' of cultural objects that give off and give rise to something specific: "while [cultural objects] are subjectively apprehended, and socially constructed, they are *also*, at the same time, objective" (ibid: 20, emphasis in original). While this research has benefitted from focussing closely on two different case studies in the same place, I am left wondering what formation dancing looks like in other settings – and what else might manifest when *partnered with the room*.

5.7 Conclusion: commons and tragedy

Adapted fieldnotes:

> *It's summer and I am early for line dancing – the bar isn't open yet, so I have to find somewhere else to sit. Despite the club not being 'open', some of the running group are already here. Setting off around 6pm, the runners arrive back in groups and sit in the lounge for squash and tea – and some of the early arrivals are here.*

> *It is nice weather so I walk past the runners, through the hall I'll soon be dancing in, and out the back to the bowling greens.*

> *On a Monday night the club is shared by lawn bowlers (in the summer), a women's darts team, snooker players, and the running (and yoga!) club. I sit by the green in the sun.*

> *Behind me is a vegetable patch. The man gardening comes and sits next to me, striking up conversation. 'I'm not sure I recognise you'. I explain that I'm doing some research with the line dancing club. 'Aha! Never tried it myself'.*

> *We chat for a bit then sit in silence. It's sunny and the sound of the road is distant.*

I have arrived at the end of a chapter that tries at times to explore (and celebrate) solidarity without defining it. This is because it is a solidarity that I witnessed rather than prefigured. What I have tried to describe is not the solidarity portrayed in the film *Pride*, for instance – that depicts the real events of lesbian and gay activists in the 1980s raising money for striking miners in Britain. This feels like a classic, and very moving example of solidarity – and solidarity that navigates some difference as well as shared interests, as well as being explicitly political. There wasn't the same difference navigated at Lynda's classes, nor explicit politics, but I still want to use 'solidarity' for a couple of reasons. Firstly, this is because the social relations at the club went so much beyond accommodation – this partly why I wanted to use a different word to Laurier and Philo (2006). Mourning and ageing wasn't simply tolerated, but shared and understood much more collectively. And if solidarity is standing together as one rather than standing alone, then line dancing seems just that. Another example of solidarity on-screen can be found in the second season of Netflix's coming-of-age drama *Sex Education*. After one

of the characters (Aimee) is sexually assaulted on a bus, the show focuses on her struggles to come to terms with the attack, and to understand her own reaction to it. Later, after a bonding moment with female classmates sharing their experiences of unwanted male attention (the show is set in a John Hughes-looking high school), we see Aimee walking to the bus stop and her classmates appear. 'What are you doing here?' 'We're getting the bus … We're all getting the bus'. The sequence closes with Aimee and her friends packed across the backseats, the significance between the characters clear. This example doesn't have the range of *Pride*, nor the explicit politics (it is also fictional), but it is still solidarity – and it has a politics.

Despite a different starting point to the darts discussion, in this chapter I have again attempted to engage with what it was that people found valuable in their leisurely pursuits – and link this to other value questions. Banks (2017) offered a route into engaging with the cultural thing in question, and so correct for some of the distance created by an argument like everyday participation. But I also wanted to explore the thingness of the classes – the way the dancing was done. This question of thingness, and particularly the 'variations' at the club, were the engine of this chapter.

This discussion has benefitted from more literature on embodiment – McCormack (2008), Laurier and Philo (2006), and Radley (1995) help attend to questions that are vital to understanding the dance classes. In the last chapter, conviviality clipped the wings of a more populist cultural value argument, but here conviviality, and the focus that Laurier and Philo provide, has helped develop a fuller value argument – and explore a similar 'geography of kindness' that Laurier and Philo allude to.

The question of cultural politics has been much more explicit in this chapter than the last. Of course the demand for the recognition of forms of everyday participation is political: identifying a cultural-political framing that fails to recognise less celebrated cultural and leisure practices, and wanting to correct this. This is a political argument. And Banks making claims about life enriching cultural objects and practices is political – and how to make sure these things are available to everyone. Hesmondhalgh (2013) goes a bit further, and while reluctant to suggest the political value of music is best found in examples of expressed political views in songs – like Band Aid, for instance – there is something political in the affective capacity for music to bring people together and enliven a sense of publicness:

"It is in the rich forms of sociability enabled by music that our mutual dependence and

obligation can be most powerfully felt, and this can inform our contributions to political life, from voting to demonstrating. One of the main values that musical culture promulgates, time and again, is the virtue of sociable publicness.

In clubs and dance halls and bedrooms across the world, experiences of musical sociability and intimacy may be laying the grounds for new ways of inculcating a sense of what we have in common with others – the grounds for any meaningful kinds of politics, and any worthwhile form of living." (ibid: 146, 170)

To again adopt Williams' and Highmore's phrasing, you might say that Hesmondhalgh is arguing for the potential of music to promote more collectivist 'ethoses'. This is the political argument I would suggest for line dancing: that it is full of the potential for mutuality and solidarity. If I have a caution here, it is about asking too much of dance classes like Lynda's, or maybe asking too little.

The distinction I have drawn between thing and thingness, that I hope has helped move any analysis along, is like Williams' draws both senses of culture: 'a whole way of life' and 'the special processes of discovery and creative effort' ([1958] 1989: 4). Williams wanted to focus on the coming together of these, and what I have described as thingness is the *coming together* in this instance. When attempting to make a cultural justice argument, in the style of either of the opening arguments of the darts and dancing chapters, this seems like an important thing to do. In the next chapter, I will speculate my own cultural justice argument for the importance of thinking both senses of culture together à la Williams.

The defining argument in this chapter is advocating for 'unfinished' cultural forms – that here brilliantly unfinished. The final fieldnote included that begins this header nods to *getting out yourself*, quoting Kate again: '[line dancing] does ye good, gets you out yourself a couple times a week which is good'. What does it mean to get out yourself? I think based on Lynda's classes, and also the darts case study, it means entering into a time and space that is less inhibited, and more vital. And especially at the line dancing club, it is important to stress the idea of getting out of what, to what? Spaces and practices that provide this release, and especially those that provide a ways into a more collective release and realisation matter: because it is the best 'grounds for any meaningful kinds of politics, and any worthwhile form of living'.

6 Reflections and suggestions

Having explored at length both case studies, and offered different reflections on cultural value and meaning, the purpose of this chapter is to collect some central arguments from this work – and suggest areas for future research. This is not a separate and more traditional analysis chapter, given much of the analysis has already been folded into the proceeding case study discussions. Instead, my plan here is to round out these larger chapters by condensing some of their insights, and point to future research interests.

Under the first header I will propose my own cultural justice argument – bringing together insights gained after exploring both anchoring justice argument through the case studies, and especially trying to learn from Lynda's classes. Pushing and testing these ideas for cultural justice has led to some lasting questions, and from these I offer my own suggestion. I will then restate the argument for thinking about cultural taste in terms of transformation as much as confirmation, and discuss how the line dancing and darts examples both show the importance of this. Under the final two headers I will outline areas for future research: first in terms of cultural meaning and later life, to which the line dancing case study is one example that encourages further thinking; and finally a question of culture and cultural infrastructure, extending the earlier discussions of infrastructure and making links to other literature, and toward more questions and toward (hopefully) more research. As stated in the introduction to this thesis, I am thinking of this chapter as a pre-conclusion, with the aim of consolidating arguments from the previous two chapters.

6.1 Justice for two cultures

After framing this thesis around two different cultural justice arguments, I want to offer my own. Having worked through each cultural justice argument, where one wants to collapse any bounded idea of arts and cultural practice, and the other wanting to affirm the particular value of cultural objects and practices, in both instances I have found these calls persuasive but also lacking – and by lacking I mean, using Skegg's (1997) language on the value of ethnography, lacking 'plausible explanation' when thinking through each case study. Williams writes about the importance of thinking two senses of culture together: culture in terms of form, and culture more broadly in terms of shared meanings. It is the connection between these cultures, and the coming together of 'a whole way of life' and 'the special processes of discovery and creative effort', where Williams ([1958] 1989: 4) sought to draw focus. This makes some sense when thinking through the Stoke darts scene – where a

culture of darts sustains a practice that is heightened by shared enthusiasm. But the form doesn't change, so much as a collective passion enlivens those feelings of playing darts – this is what I have tried to describe as *Barcelona* (header 4.4). The connection between two senses of culture, though, is the best way of making sense of Lynda's line dancing classes, because the form did change – and a justice argument can be suggested here.

What are the two senses of culture at the line dancing club? As a 'whole way of life', we might think of culture in terms of ageing, grief, intimacy over time, and a collectivist spirit – echoing Williams' own sense of working class 'emphases on neighbourhood, mutual obligation, and common betterment' (ibid: 8). And in terms of form, line dancing was an act of moving together, being (almost) in sync, something workout-like, and with various affective codes of joy and melancholy written into the music and movement – though as McCormack (2008) argues, these are always embodied and performed differently.

Each of the anchor cultural justice arguments shades toward one of Williams' cultures: everyday participation toward culture as shared meanings, and Banks (2017) toward culture as form. In only seeing culture so broadly, and to an extent rubbishing the value of form beyond what form signifies, my assessment of everyday participation was that an unhelpful distance was created through this commitment to a taste hierarchy – though nobly seeking out *not opera* activities, those *not opera* activities were clustered together only by their symbolic opposition to high culture. Many things aren't posh, and many of those things we might consider good and worthy, but developing an oppositional cultural value argument means engaging with 'experiential meanings' (Highmore, 2016b) – where form matters beyond its symbolic capital. Banks wants to restate the importance of cultural objects and the roles they play in people's lives, but form and context were not easily separated at Lynda's classes. In fact the activity (rather than object) found new meaning emerging, as it did, from shared experience in ageing, rather than shared meanings giving shape to the engagement. It was the other way round to how Banks has it: the dance changed, and the meanings with it – this is the argument I tried to advance under header 5.2.2b.

What happens when thinking two senses of culture together? For one, what you lose is a certain clarity in argument, and this is a loss. Advocacy, as an important political act, becomes more complicated – much as I want to prescribe line dancing for all, the real value is in the intimate connection between people and practice. But despite making things more complicated, I think there are also grounds for hope. I have tried to describe solidarity as an emergent affect and action,

reflected in the thingness of Lynda's line dance classes. You would be hard pressed to argue solidarity is a necessary outcome of a particular group of people or place, though certainly suggested, or that solidarity is guaranteed by a practice, though also suggested. It is guaranteed by neither, but possible in both.

What this plays out as really is an argument for attention and opportunity: attention to the connections between both senses of culture, and opportunity for those connections to emerge. Attention is quite simple – look for it – and opportunity is a call-back to Williams' ([1958] 1989: 16) 'the difficult full space, the original full time'. Rather than prescribing the necessary connection between line dancing and ageing, though there does seem an interesting connection here, perhaps best is to understand and celebrate the kinds of cultural spaces and conditions under which particular cultural (in both senses) things manifest – a point I elaborate on shortly, thinking about working men's clubs.

Here is perhaps the best place to address the question baked into the argument for everyday participation, and one I have not offered a full answer to: what are the limits of what could or should be called cultural practice? In essence, what is it? Towards the end of Chapter 4 I questioned the value of folding all leisure experiences under the banner of 'cultural practice', and suggested finding other ways of describing the value of something like darts – or if there are connections to (traditionally considered) cultural practice, let them emerge more organically, rather than forcing a flattening of different kinds of experience. Again: maybe playing darts is different, and maybe the better for it? But I would struggle through Lynda's classes to make a declarative case for line dancing being a cultural practice in a way darts is not. As discussed, many of the regulars enjoyed line dancing as a form of bodily and mental exercise, and the usual tag of 'creativity' might not stick easily to line dancing – Lynda was creative in her choreography and her adaptive teaching, but the creativity I spent more time discussing was the flouting of form and a move away from a more neatly bracketed idea of aesthetic experience. Yes, here was a kind of improvisation, but I have argued it was of a convivial kind – and different, for instance, to the improvisation McCormack (2008) describes in tango. And solidarity can be arrived at variously, even as a feeling more than sombre text, through various kind of practices – a particularly joyous march, as much as a dance, might produce similar affects.

If culture and cultural practices are a label we are stuck with, given a history of elevating and celebrating certain kinds of practice done usually by certain kinds of people, it is easy to see the case

for everyday participation on a pragmatic level – to tap into a funding stream and redirect to marginalised people and practices. And indeed Hennion (2001: 18-19), despite a very different attitude to cultural taste, suggests that there is 'no clear boundary' between the pleasures and possibilities of music and 'a heterogeneous body of practices'. Despite my case studies in their specificity not much helping here, I still think it's worth not throwing all things in together – and that even if forms of dance are different, we might say dancing can fulfil and excite individually and collectively things worth paying attention to, and that maybe dance has more in common with music than darts – but that dance as a physical act, does share something with marching or Zumba, or indeed darts. The cultural aspect of dance, I think, has to do with a special sense of 'getting out yourself' as Kate said, and 'the fabrication of a different world of meaning' as Radley (1995: 12) puts it – though to develop and elaborate this line of thinking more is beyond the reach and remit of my thesis. I have, however, attempted to gesture to this at the end of Chapter 5, reflecting briefly on two very different examples of line dancing in different contexts.

On the importance of keeping both senses of culture, Williams (1961 [1965]) wrote:

"When we have grasped the fundamental relation between meanings arrived at by creative interpretation and description, and meanings embodied by conventions and institutions, we are in a position to reconcile the meanings of culture as 'creative activity' and 'a whole way of life', and this reconciliation is then a real extension of our powers *to understand ourselves and our societies*." (ibid: 56, emphasis added)

To think with both senses of culture is to think with complexity about experience and with complexity about cultural meaning. At least in my view, Lynda's classes are testament to this.

6.2 Questions of taste

Sociological questions of taste, and Sayer's (2011) 'commitments', are two very different ways of addressing the same questions: why do we like what we like, and why is this important? If I have a concluding thought here, it is: why not talk about them together? This is not to say that a Bourdieu-like critique of taste is not vital – and that the Understanding Everyday Participation project is not right to identify areas of chronic underfunding and disinterest, and to view sceptically any fixed idea

of cultural products and practice. But taken up bluntly, Highmore's (2016b) interesting reflections on Coltrane's *Olé* are just predictable middle class highbrow suggestions – and worse, embodying a everyday participation-like perspective, suggestions that strategically obfuscate some and excite others. But at least in my research, those middle class highbrow suggestions helped unpack the meaning of a practice that had no obvious markers of middle class-ness. So surely it isn't that simple?

I agree with Highmore and Hennion (2001) that it is worth pausing the need to evaluated taste in terms of good or bad, high or low, and to think also about those bodies and routines and places and times that help produce cultural pleasures. But Sayer (2011) pushes through this complexity to arrive at a more definitive suggestion: commitments, as a special kind of taste, are vitally important. If Highmore wants to open up questions of taste to questions of personal and collective feeling, Sayer's sense of commitments is *all feeling* – of the deepest and least fleeting kind. Highmore says feelings are important, and Sayer says some are more important than others.

Rather than say questions of taste necessarily have to engage with a harder idea of commitments, my point is that they might. And at the same time, as Highmore (2010; 2016b) also suggests, remain alive to the idea that in a taste for this or that, lies a taste for something that has a politics – like his description of choirs and school dinners and 'feelings of democracy'. As best as I could, this is the argument I have tried to develop with the line dancing club, and it is an argument that would be lost if Lynda and the dancer's wonderful inventiveness was just the manifestation of a taste hierarchy.

This question of what taste means was central to the darts discussion, and especially what it means that a place has a taste for something. Various explanations were offered: that for Tony's dad, darts fitted around a pattern of shift work that was the norm in Stoke – and Tony, like others following others, joined him in it; and Tim suggesting a link between the inherent friendliness of Stokies and their booming leagues, because one requires the other; and also John describing a natural bonhomie between a not-posh city and a not-posh pastime. All of these, taken from a particular class perspective, suggest something predictable about the passion for darts: structurally in terms of working patterns, socially reflecting a shared patter and ways of relating, and culturally in terms of not-posh associations. While this tells some of the story, it doesn't tell us why darts is more popular in Stoke than Sunderland, or why John might choose darts over football, or really what dartists get out of darts. This isn't a question of taste so much as a question of why even think about taste.

To better understand this, I think also means engaging with what I described under *Barcelona* (header

4.4), and means thinking taste in terms of transformation as much as confirmation. With any effort to try and do justice to an activity marginal to academic or other interests, this seems important – because part of the reasons we like what we like has to do with what we are exposed to, and what we are encouraged (and not encouraged) to do, but also the ways those things fulfil and excite us. This is Sayer's point, and it is interesting to think about taste in these terms: as a route to flourishing. While the line dancing club could also be described in the same terms, I developed a different argument – that there were lessons here in tastes ageing, and it was significant that the practice changed with the dancers. While I don't have a declarative point here, I am trying to suggest that questions of taste can be usefully opened out, and that while rejecting any idea that people are uncultured by their lack of enthusiasm for high cultural purists, there is complexity and various kinds of judgement exercised that are worth paying attention to.

6.3 Culture and later life

What are special meanings of cultural practice in later life? This seems a necessary question to ask at the end of this thesis. Responding to changing demographics in many Western countries, and the challenges that older people face in terms of isolation and deteriorating physical health, there is plenty of literature suggesting arts and cultural practice significantly contribute to the wellbeing of an ageing population: Teater and Baldwin (2014), for example, describe the reported benefits of a community-arts singing programme that aims to support new friendships and give participants 'something to look forward to' (ibid: 85). Like at Lynda's classes, Teater and Baldwin relay descriptions of singing being therapeutic, and the meetups radically changing attendees' perspective on life – and Teater and Baldwin suggest that here is a different way of thinking about social care policy: being preventative rather than reactive to the physical and mental health challenges faced by older people. Reynolds (2015) similarly champions positive social capital surrounding choirs, and the 'positive self-identities' emerging from activities sustained over a number of years – this offering a meaningful feeling of continuity. With a similar interest in wellbeing, Evans, Bray and Garabedian (2021) report positively on the success of a 'creative ageing' programme at a UK arts centre, and in doing so: "support growing calls to promote the role of creative arts activities in increasing social interaction as an attempt to tackle isolation and loneliness" (ibid: 8). To avoid further listing, Cann (2016) makes similar arguments, even suggesting that for the arts to escape a narrow policy focus a cost-benefit case for spending on health and care services versus cultural investment needs to be made (ibid: 193), and Age UK's (2018) recent report finds a strong correlation between cultural uptake and quality of life – and makes a number of useful recommendations around access and inclusion.

Summarising these, the focus seems to be on loneliness and challenging any acceptance that life gets worse as you get older, and that the arts might help here.

What's wrong with this? Who doesn't want older people to have a better time? Reviewing similar literature, and including international examples, Bernard and Rickett (2017) observe: "arts participation also has esthetic [sic] elements although, to date, very little of the research discussed in our review focuses on the esthetic [sic] quality of older people's drama or what it feels like to have an esthetic [sic] experience" (ibid: 22). In essence, the suggestion is that art and culture stop being talked about as art and culture when older people are involved – cultural practice becomes a crude instrument, though an instrument with noble goals, towards an already-understood problem.

Amy Barron's (2021) writing is a potentially useful intervention here. Approaching age as less a fixed category, and instead an experience which is diverse and changing, Barron makes the case for a more adventurous sense of ageing that always 'takes place': "considering older age as it *takes place* welcomes a focus on the different ways it is (and is not) related to, and the factors that mediate this relation as life unfolds – something which is largely missing in work which approaches ageing from a social constructionist perspective" (ibid: 666, emphasis in original). While not denying some common concerns for older people, Barron is interested in thinking beyond the 'static truths' that dominate the literature, so that instead: "older age […] becomes something which is performed, resisted and embodied at different moments" (ibid).

Such a perspective allows for a more expansive idea of ageing experiences – and an appreciation that *taking place* at Lynda's classes were jokes about losing memory and dodgy joints, mistakes repackaged as 'variations', and connections in grief. The importance of these experiences should be read against other experiences of ageing – less that *old people need these things*, but maybe people feel less old when they do them. Acknowledging this allows for better appreciation of the dominant narratives of ageing, and events and affects that change these narratives. And indeed, it offers cause for hope – which has been a dominant theme in my attempts to write about line dancing: what else is possible? Rather than forgo any idea that older people value cultural experiences beyond a want for company and purpose, those of course these things are important, why not assume older people are capable cultural actors who can produce and consume culture in a less instrumental way? – that does connect to experiences of getting older, like all our cultural experiences connect to something, but those experiences are not singular nor the kinds of meaning arrived so neat and fixed.

6.4 The culture of cultural infrastructure

Sketching further areas for research, I think it would be interesting and useful to think through working men's clubs as a particular kind of cultural infrastructure. With a committee and a model of collective ownership, what kind of cultural practices does organisational form give rise to? Are there any lessons here? And is it worth claiming working men's clubs, and social clubs and other members-run leisure sites, as a good model for cultural infrastructure?

With more time, and indeed going forward, I would spend more of it sitting in on committee meetings, trying to understand the way line dancing and other activities were discussed at the club – and the way this collective management helped Lynda beyond keeping the rent down. Of course pricing the hall is important, but what else? And more critically, did this kind of membership-governance have its blind spots – was it also limited?

J.K Gibson-Graham (2003) writes: "if we see the economy as always and already diverse, then the project of replacement is transformed into a project of strengthening already existing non-capitalist economic processes and building new non-capitalist enterprises" (ibid: 157). Even within late capitalism, economies at all scales are made up of actors and transactions and values that aren't just an expression of capitalist norms – there is a 'politics of possibility' that exists despite capitalist realism (Gibson-Graham, 2006), and so there are grounds for work and hope. Gibson-Graham considers the Mondragon cooperatives in Spain, concluding positively in observing: "[privileging] relations of social connection and interdependence between workers and workers and citizens, bringing the sociality of the economy to the fore" (2003: 156). The paper makes a detailed consideration of the history and workings of the Mondragon cooperatives, and I won't list them here, but their suggestion is that in principles and practice cooperatives might still be significant in sketching 'political becomings' that are key to a broader cultural-economic transformation.

At the time of writing, the Club and Institute Union (CIU) – this is the representing body of what used to be called 'industrial and provident societies', and now named amongst 'cooperative and community benefit societies', in the UK – represents the interests of close to 1600 clubs[9]. Far beyond my research, the CIU represents a vast network of organisations committed to a different model of commerce – one based on cooperative standards of collective management and not-for-profit norms.

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[9] Many working men's clubs are member organisations, as well as Labour Clubs, Liberal Clubs, British Legion clubs and other village clubs. Not all social clubs are CIU members – clubhistorians.co.uk is a useful resource here, though the picture it gives is still opaque (if colourful).

Like Gibson-Graham finds elsewhere, are there grounds for hope here?

Cherrington (2009) reflects on working men's clubs as cultural policy actors, and sketches the history of CIU clubs. Many clubs were formed in the mid-19th century, with rises in wages and better regulations of working hours prompting concerns over what these freer masses would do with their new time and money. Working men's clubs were seen from upon-high as an alternative to the vices of drink and gambling, and so had a paternalistic beginning. However, going into the 20th-century control had been wrestled away from the founders by the members, and alcohol and light entertainment, rather than a more reformist educational agenda, was more the norm – though an affect of 'respectable' working class culture remained (ibid).

Through this analysis, Cherrington describes working men's clubs as having a particular independent streak in their history: after the revolutions in working club culture of the late 19th-century, a movement for self-governance by and for working people. But this self-governance should be read intersectionally, and it wasn't until 2007 that women were allowed CIU associate membership, and thus allowed into any CIU-affiliated working men's club in the country. Before then women could be members of a particular working men's club, but a membership that allowed blanket access to any and all clubs was seen to undermine any one club's right to make their own choice on the matter (and we can imagine the misogyny lurking behind this defence). And Cherrington describes instances of racial discrimination in the 1960s and 70s, where with a similar line to that on women's rights to membership, the CIU's commitment to autonomy propped up cultures of racism – even while higher-ups in the union spoke of solidarity across difference.

In terms of cultural policy, Cherrington's suggestion is that working men's clubs reflect a history of culture clashes: between efforts to change working class cultural habits and the desire for cultural self-determination, followed by the difficulties in negotiating this self-determination when aspirational goals of collectivism rub with conservatism. Cherrington is overall high on interest but short on suggestion, and I identify with that, but I would want to pay more attention to the kinds of cultural practice that emerge from these institutions. Vail and Hollands' (2012a; 2012b) papers on the Amber Film and Photography Collective, a Newcastle-based arts group established in the 1960s with radical egalitarian ideals, point some way to the future shape of this interest. For starters, Vail and Hollands (2012a) situate Amber's emergence within the broader cultural-political context of May 68 and the rise of the New Left in the UK, and cascading radical arts initiatives that followed. Working men's clubs emerge from a different cultural-historical moment, with contestations along the way,

but how do these histories and ideas continue? What does their collectivism mean now? And what does *working class respectability*, if it still persists at clubs, look like today? How does this all shape the cultural thingness of the cultural thing? Against the contemporary vision of alienated, hyper-competitive and apolitical cultural work, Vail and Hollands (2012b) describe some successes and challenges of doing cultural labour differently – that was alive and active in broader political concerns, aspiringly democratic, and yet demanded so much of its members and struggled to scale-up. Amber is 'oppositional', and in what ways might working men's clubs be described as oppositional? – where politics may be in the minor key, but a politics endures.

The reason I ask all this is because of the obvious symmetry between the way I have described line dancing and the solidaristic associations of working men's clubs. The fleeting mention of this connection offered from my fieldwork is in the way Lynda describes the habits of members clubs and the habits of line dancing: the importance of having a space. My hunch is that these cultures of collectivism shape the activities that go on there, and a useful future project would combine some of the ways I have tried to describe line dancing at the working men's club with a more sober consideration of the organisational style of the institutions themselves. With 1600 clubs in the CIU, social clubs might be a significant resource for different models of cooperative alternatives, and support valuable forms of cultural practice. Of course the independent streak Cherrington describes is not neutral, and so a project of this kind would need to be alive to forms of exclusion passing under notions of collectivism – as Stuart Hall ([1992] 2017) asked, whose way of life?

This is like The Care Collective's (2020) interest in caring infrastructure, but with more of a focus on cultural practice and meaning, and necessarily involves thinking two senses of culture together. As well as being grounds for more collective ways of organising, and promoting not-for-profit norms with less market-driven ideas of success, what kinds of cultural practice might such models of collective ownership produce? These questions are also similar to Wilson, Gross and Bull's (2017) want to understand the best 'institutional arrangements' for richer and more democratic cultural lives but, to use Highmore's (2010) eidos and ethos frame again, with an interest in the ethos of the cultural practice then emerging. What meanings and understandings are arrived at, and what kinds of value do people draw from them? These are questions I would like to take up.

Under these four headers I have tried to bring together some of the significant ideas explored in chapters 4 and 5, and draw some conclusions as well as asking further questions. With the first two headers I have tried to establish some core arguments that follow from this research, that are a result of interrogating different demands for cultural justice, but also go beyond them. Under the final two headers I have gestured toward future connections and asked questions I am less able to answer, but think I can usefully point toward – here I have found the edges of what I am able to say, but would like to say more about. In the next chapter I will offer a more rounded conclusion on the thesis as a whole, and return to my initial research question and how this thesis has addressed it.

7 Conclusion

To answer my research question *How might we best understand and value forms of everyday cultural practices?*, in this thesis I have invested in two opposing cultural justice arguments and explored them through two case studies. I invested in these justice arguments because I wanted to discuss cultural value with an angle – with each justice argument establishing a view on what to study, and why to study it. With these different perspectives, and their differing answers to the *understanding* and *value* aspects of my research question, I followed threads that emerged through a close engagement with my case studies. To begin this conclusion, I will summarise my journey with each of these arguments, highlighting where the case studies helped extend and question everyday participation (Miles and Gibson, 2016; 2017) and Banks' *Creative Justice* (2017), and what conclusions I have drawn.

7.1 The cultural justice-case study journeys

In Chapter 4, I began by introducing the call for everyday participation. I established the foundational critique that drives this discursive and policy-focused shift – the critique being that what is commonly and unreflexively labelled *arts and culture* focuses funding and attention in only a small set of practices, enjoyed by too few. The contention of the Understanding Everyday Participation project is that this limited focus excludes a vast array of other valuable and meaningful activities, and therefore people, from full consideration. Rather than engaging with a logic of cultural deficit (Miles and Sullivan, 2010; 2012), in which a place or people are deemed culturally bereft by a lack of uptake with mainstream and routinely-measured forms of arts engagement, the turn to everyday participation signals a desire to understand what else people are doing – and bring them into the mainstream. Rather than promote any settled idea of a cultural canon, and canonical practices associated with it, the label 'everyday participation' establishes a different model for thinking about cultural value: "by opening up, rather than pre-empting, discussion of what constitutes participation, this approach restores context to the notion of cultural value" (Miles, 2016: 191). In Chapter 4, my shorthand for this was *not opera*.

As well as introducing this perspective, which captured some of the spirit of Phil Taylor's guiding quote, I spent time discussing Raymond Williams' *Culture is Ordinary* ([1958] 1989) essay. This was for two reasons: firstly, because the essay's influence is clear on the project, and indeed influential much more widely, but also because there seemed to be some key differences. When Williams wrote persuasively about the rich culture of his upbringing, did this mean that any neat idea 'cultural

practice' should be dismantled? – and though Williams' (ibid: 16) vision of cultural growth was '[clearing] the channels and let all the offerings be made', were there no limits to this offering? Is darts an offering? This is made more complicated by Williams' insistence on understanding culture in two ways: as 'a whole way of life', and 'the special processes of discovery and creative effort' (ibid: 4). Despite rejecting an idea of working class cultural deficit, it seemed less certain that Williams was rejecting any idea of 'special processes of discovery'. As was suggested, the idea of everyday participation is interesting in its differences from its influences – like embracing Bourdieu's (1984) *vulgar* tastes, and not seeing them as vulgar. In the introduction to this thesis I suggested Phil Taylor is a natural ally, but I think Sid Waddell, the late-great voice of darts quoted in Chapter 4, would have been a passionate advocate for everyday participation.

Toward the end of this establishing section I made two further connections that informed the thinking to come: first to Hesmondhalgh's (2013) night out, where context and cultural meaning were folded together – this being an explicit goal for everyday participation – and to Highmore's (2016a) sense of 'culture-at-a-distance'. Describing the pub gig, Hesmondhalgh is wonderfully not-at-a-distance, and this is achieved through an understanding of the role of music in the scene, and an interest in Elvis impersonators beyond them reflecting either high or low cultural sensibilities. Through these links I posed two further questions: though wanting to restore context to cultural value debates, does a collective label for *everything other than* (or *not opera*) restore context beyond an idea of taste hierarchy – and is this important? And from Hesmondhalgh, what if forms of everyday participation actively exclude certain groups – where does that leave the question of value? I also quoted Phil Taylor, with a less celebratory take on Stokie culture: is darts popular because there is nothing else to do? I didn't ask these questions with the hope of undermining the justice argument I was exploring, but I do think they are helpful questions.

After this, I introduced how I would understand labels like 'everyday' and 'mundane' throughout the rest of the thesis. Drawing on my interview with Ian White, *Seinfeld* and again Ben Highmore (2002a; 2002b; 2018), I developed an idea of everyday activities beyond what is offered by everyday participation. Here I understood everyday as having some special use in the writing to come, by holding together certain contradictions – it was relatively mundane for the dartists at The Brown Bear when Ian walked in to give me some posters, but it seemed extraordinary that it was ordinary. And at Lydna's classes, the easy and ordinary way the line dancers negotiated the shattering experience of losing a partner was intensely valued – and here I wondered if everyday might figure more meaningfully in value arguments.

With the terrain then set, I dug into my fieldwork with the hope of engaging these questions – that were related to, but complicated my broad research question: is the best way to understand everyday cultural practices to throw out any predetermined ideas of what is and what is not cultural practice? – and what does it mean to label darts a cultural practice? How do we understand the value that people attribute to these other practices? – and is it enough that something is simply *not opera*? I began by organising interviews with darts players around these questions, beginning to establish a picture of the scene, as well as introducing ideas about cultural taste that differed from Bourdieu's (1984) structural account. In these interviews, Stoke darts comes across as a thriving practice – and not 'trading down' in the way Jayne (2004) describes working class cultures in the city. The 'everything else' that both dartists and dancers described, as the value of the activity beyond the activity, more clearly emerged here, and had an obvious social element – different players described the fun and drinking and communitarian connections enjoyed being part of the league. Darts in Stoke comes across as both unpretentious and storied – where practising two hours a day is reasonably understood as 'casual'. I spent time trying to unpick John's reflections that clearly relate to questions of cultural taste – Stoke darts is not for 'posh knobs', but his taste for darts was also more layered than this. There is too brief a glimpse of a better thesis when Annie describes her love of being involved in an atmosphere where she had previously felt excluded, plus the comments of the tongue-in-cheek 'housewives league' – there is a great unanswered question here on the kinds of value female dartists especially found.

Acknowledging the limits of these interviews, where Tim said explicitly that the things that made darts great were impossible to describe, I used Highmore's *Cultural Feelings* (2017) to try and capture these *hard to say* bits. Here I wanted to explore *Barcelona* as a collective mood, an atmosphere that took over the pub on league nights, and also bring out elements of my participant observation and general joining in. Using *material*, *work*, *history* and *social* as guides, I tried to tease out what makes the right pub on the right night Barcelona-like. As well as darts being *just a bit of fun*, it became clear here that 'fun' is not an adequate description.

In an attempt to address the difficult questions around value that were emerging, I then invested in three further value frames not explicitly connected to cultural value debates – because if cultural value narratives and the cultural canon have not served darts to this point, where else might a strong value claim be found? Here social infrastructure (Klinenberg, 2018; Latham and Layton, 2019), caring infrastructure (The Care Collective, 2020) and conviviality (Gilroy, 2004; 2006; Jackson, 2018; 2020)

were introduced, and I think helpfully extended the question of everyday participation by exploring complementary value frames – and conviviality especially introducing some necessary ambiguity.

The result of this journey was that many of the difficult questions introduced at the beginning of the chapter remained, but some clarity was achieved. It seemed to me that Sayer's (2011) sense of 'commitments', and darts in Stoke being a powerful example of this, showed a way forward – that non-traditional forms of cultural practice, despite their lack of consideration by some, were in fact essential to the lives of those that treasured them. In a city where that commitment is shared by so many, here is an example of commitments flourishing: and people flourishing with them. The usefulness of insistently describing these things as cultural practice, though, I remained unconvinced by – despite it being my choice to think about darts and cultural value together, of course. *Everything other than*, I wondered, was not an altogether helpful starting point, and a more complimentary project might be to write *Why Darts Matters*, or indeed *Why Village Halls Matter*. Again, I was left without an answer to *What if there is nothing else to do?*, though the discussions organised around other value arguments did help in exploring the question of exclusion – and clarify its importance.

Two things in particular came from this chapter. First was an appreciation of Hennion's (2001) and Highmore's (2016b) want to rethink accepted sociological understandings of cultural taste – and to think about taste in terms of experience, and not rush to questions of taste hierarchy when trying to understand the significance of preference. And secondly, as Highmore and also Williams ([1958] 1989) describe, an interest in the 'ethoses' emerging in people and practice – and with this a question of politics. The demand for recognising forms of everyday participation is of course political, in wanting to give resources and validation to excluded people and practice, but what if forms of everyday cultural practice held together, as Williams (ibid: 8) suggested, 'the best basis for any future society'? What would it mean to think about cultural value in these terms?

These questions carried into Chapter 5, where Banks (2017) offered a very different starting point to the previous chapter. Against the complete opening-up that a push for everyday participation demands, Banks wants to consolidate the value of arts and cultural practices: rather than justice for things ignored, here is justice for things already considered cultural and artistic. Rather than presenting Banks' argument and then separately presenting Lynda's line dance classes, following the structure of the previous chapter, I instead introduced them together. It is worth saying again that the scaffolding Banks offers could be usefully applied to the darts scene in Stoke, and in this sense is perhaps not totally successful at establishing what is *different* about cultural experiences – though

this also due to my research focusing on collective and participatory practices, to which there will be some overlap, and to the difficult task of saying what might unite the full variety of cultural experiences.

The chapter found its momentum in 'the unpredictabilities' at the line dance classes – three insights from my fieldwork that upset Banks' cultural justice framing. While Banks figures unpredictability in the shapes of our cultural experiences – in 'differing social contexts' affecting 'distinctive patterns of reception' (ibid: 20-21) – in different ways these unpredictabilities were more than 'patterns of reception'. First, I described the ways that line dancing was often talked about as a form of exercise – the same steps to the same music but understood very differently. I then introduced the key idea of the chapter: the dancing 'variations'. How should we understand the dancing going wrong, but the evening going right? In short: what were these variations doing? Addressing these questions, I was helped by McCormack (2008) – and understanding dance as less an act of representation, where the meanings of moving this way and that are already understood, but as movements that are always differently performed by different bodies in different spaces. Here I introduced the argument I wanted to develop throughout the chapter: that the attitude to variations reflected and manifested a broader attitude of solidarity at the club – and here was a different political argument to explore. It was also an argument that seemed to cut against the position arrived at toward the end of Chapter 4 – moving away from an idea of already-understood human needs, and toward a more emergent sense of wants and possibilities generated by people and practice. This all seemed to follow, but the aches and pains many dancers were nursing made human needs hard to forget. The final unpredictability outlined was the loosening of the Americana affect, and a subversion of the cultural identity of line dancing – playfully dubbed 'Nashville-on-Trent'.

Pursuing *What do the variations do?*, I briefly considered reinvesting an artistic and representational interpretation a la Adorno – that in the breaking of form, new and less bourgeois aesthetic arrangements contribute to exciting and vital forms cultural development. Instead, I drew on Laurier and Philo (2006) and their understanding of conviviality to unpack not just the dancing variations, but the gestures of accommodation that received them – while there was disharmony in movement, equally important were these harmonising gestures. And this harmonising had a purpose – one I wanted to argue was the product of shared experience and understanding in ageing.

Towards the end of Chapter 5, I discussed the significance of line dancing being a partnerless dance, and different experiences of grief at the club – at various points both moving and difficult to write. If

line dancing wasn't just about dancing, but 'everything else', these were the most powerful examples of *everything else*. This discussion brought up two important points: first, and borrowing from Radley (1995: 12), was the significance of the connections between the 'worlds of meaning' emerging from dance practices, and their connection to the rest of life. This was not a world apart from ageing, but a different and significant space in which grief was understood – in sitting silently or running out the hall in tears – and where fading memories was something you could laugh about (understood and accepted also, was sitting at the side chair-dancing). The second important point returned to my interest in cultural taste, and a sense that tastes aged and changed at the classes. The important story, for me, about the line dance classes were the ways they adapted to the group over time – the club took a different shape, and crucially was able to take a different shape. Returning to Williams, it is important to reflect here on 'the difficult full space, the original full time'.

After this longer and more emotive discussion of my fieldwork, the chapter rounded out with some reflections on conviviality and similarity (header 5.5), and then cultural democracy (header 5.6). I suggested in the introduction to this thesis that the research experience has challenged my ideas of socialism, and I felt challenged to think about the ways some groups and some practices are necessarily closed – and if I am to champion the line dance classes as an important site of solidarity, as I want to, then doing so also requires acknowledging that their delicate balance was sensitive to various kinds of change. Returning to *The Care Manifesto* (2020), and the ideal of 'capacious and agile' infrastructure, while the flouting of form reflected a lively and changing caring sensibility, were the classes necessarily not that capacious? I suggested that a limitation here is in not interviewing people who might have left the club.

As a means of addressing this difficult question, I turned to cultural democracy (Wilson, Gross and Bull, 2017) as a policy approach that might accommodate this complexity. Wilson, Gross and Bull envision a cultural ecology in which all citizens feel much more able to share and shape the kinds of cultural offer available. And here I arrived back at the political question that finished Chapter 4 – a question of *everything for everyone* socialism, or celebrating cultural practices that feel particularly socialist? Here is fundamental tension for my broad research question of *How might we best understand and value forms of everyday cultural practices?* – does valuing and understanding have to do with an embodied politics held together by the always-complex interplay of both senses of culture, or is valuing and understanding best directed toward an appreciation of the central importance of various kinds of cultural experience, and establishing grounds for proper advocacy to deliver this? As described by Wilson, Gross and Bull, cultural democracy seems like a good effort to deliver the latter,

but less interested in the former. For the former, I turned again to *Why Music Matters* (Hesmondhalgh, 2013: 170), and paraphrasing now: 'experiences of [line dancing] sociability and intimacy may be laying the grounds for new ways of inculcating a sense of what we have in common with others – the grounds for any meaningful kinds of politics, and any worthwhile form of living'. I have left this question, or at least my response to it, not fully answered – because I am not sure. As I suggested a different points, the recognition of human need and an emergent sense of solidarity did not feel like separate things, or understanding them being separate projects. Where I did try and address this question, I thought it best to think about them together.

Summarising this, and to an extent rushing through the majority of the work in this thesis, my goal is not just to restate the arguments to this point, but through this summary to keep returning to my research question and broader interests – and establish how I have failed and succeeded in addressing these. Where I have succeeded, I hope, has been in exploring two very different ideas of cultural justice, and in doing so thinking with complexity about cultural value and cultural meaning. I have attempted to engage the case studies and justice arguments in lively debate, and in not holding a precious idea of value and meaning before beginning, explore with some range the significance of everyday cultural practices. In Chapter 6 I collected four key reflections and suggestions that have emerged from my research: offering my own cultural justice argument; a wish to open out questions of cultural taste; future thinking on the significance of cultural practice and later life; and a developing interest in collective ownership models and cultural practice. These, I also hope, are some successes.

7.2 Implications and limitations

The key implications of this thesis are already covered in Chapter 6, but I think another useful contribution comes from wanting to establish the complex meaning of labels like 'everyday' and 'mundane'. In this thesis I have tried to advance an idea that *the everyday* is often a paradoxical thing to talk about, and rather than pre-figure what is and what is not everyday – as I did, to an extent, in my choice of case studies and research question – use these ideas instead as a means of holding together significant contradictions that help in understanding the meaning and significance of different practices. This sense of contradictions helped to appreciate the ways grief was managed at Lynda's line dance classes, and also the everyday-excellence of the Stoke darts scene.

In terms of research on Stoke, I have aimed to avoid the genre of urban studies that Bell and Jayne (2006; 2009) describe. At different points in this thesis I have engaged with a question of city

smallness, and have found it helpful in furthering my understanding. I have also, however, by my choice of examples perhaps perpetuated the caricature of Stoke as a completely *working class city* – and in that sense not offered the fuller sense of place I once hoped for. Stoke has theatres and an artsy cinema – I might have chosen more contrasting, in one sense, case studies. This is not a major regret, as the central role of place in this thesis shifted over time, but it is important to acknowledge.

While I have attempted to explore and test two different vision of cultural justice, and then propose my own, I am also limited by the close focus of this thesis. As well as not offering a broader picture of cultural habits in Stoke through survey or mapping exercises, the more theoretical conclusions I have drawn are limited by the two examples I have used. As well as typically lacking in generalisability, it makes my engagement with policy concerns more limited – while I think there is an important policy lesson in the significance of cultural practices being able to take different kinds of shapes, and that the role of practice in cultural experience is complex, I still lack a neat proposal. While it has not been my aspiration to produce policy recommendations, this is also a limitation.

As well as these, I failed to explore properly the significance of the women's darts scene in Stoke – when chatting about my research over the last few years, this is one of the things most people are interested in, and one of the things I am least able to give a picture of. And as discussed, by wanting to explore what was thriving in Stoke, and pick up Bell and Jayne's question about small city successes, I lack a more balanced picture. I think, on reflection, this has something to do with the year I was planning my fieldwork – which I outlined in Chapter 2 – and also my happy accident at finding such a beloved dancing club and darts team. Had I not stumbled on these examples, this would have been a very different thesis.

My overall hope for this research is to, despite finding questions of value and meaning difficult and often contradictory, contribute to the wide bodies of literature that try and engage with these important questions. Having started with a commitment to not think Stoke uncultured, I think this holds true.

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Appendix: Ethics Committee Approval

The Secretariat
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UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

Mark Ball
School of Media and Communication
University of Leeds
Leeds, LS2 9JT

Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Cultures Research Ethics Committee
University of Leeds

20 April 2022

Dear Mark

Title of study	**'The Barcelona for Darts'? Living well in Stoke on Trent**
Ethics reference	**PVAR 17-060**

I am pleased to inform you that the above research application has been reviewed by the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Cultures Research Ethics Committee and I can confirm a favourable ethical opinion as of the date of this letter. The following documentation was considered:

Document	Version	Date
PVAR 17-060 ETHICS REVIEW.docx	1	12/01/18
PVAR 17-060 INTRO EMAIL.docx	1	12/01/18
PVAR 17-060 INFORMATION SHEET.docx	1	12/01/18
PVAR 17-060 CONSENT FORM.docx	1	12/01/18
PVAR 17-060 SCRIPT.docx	1	12/01/18
PVAR 17-060 RISK ASSESSMENT.docx	1	12/01/18

Committee members made the following comments about your application:

General comments	
There are only a couple incredibly minor things that the reviewers wanted to point out. This is a very thorough and professional ethics review.	
Application section	**Comment**
A7	You needed to tick the box saying 'none of the above'
Information sheet	Please include the contact details of at least one of your supervisors so that participants have an alternative contact.
Consent form	Consider adding a data archive question to the consent form.

Please notify the committee if you intend to make any amendments to the information in your ethics

application as submitted at date of this approval as all changes must receive ethical approval prior to implementation. The amendment form is available at http://ris.leeds.ac.uk/EthicsAmendment.

Please note: You are expected to keep a record of all your approved documentation and other documents relating to the study, including any risk assessments. This should be kept in your study file, which should be readily available for audit purposes. You will be given a two week notice period if your project is to be audited. There is a checklist listing examples of documents to be kept which is available at http://ris.leeds.ac.uk/EthicsAudits.

We welcome feedback on your experience of the ethical review process and suggestions for improvement. Please email any comments to ResearchEthics@leeds.ac.uk.

Yours sincerely

Jennifer Blaikie
Senior Research Ethics Administrator, the Secretariat
On behalf of Prof Robert Jones, Chair, AHC FREC

CC: Student's supervisor(s)