Amateur music-making as intersubjective discourse in folk clubs in the English Midlands.

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Dissertation submitted for Doctor of Philosophy

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Date of submission: 4th July 2013

Dedicated to the countless amateur musicians and singers
who perform week after week at folk clubs, sessions and singarounds across the nation
– and to the organisers and audiences who make it happen.

'Pete Willow'

Abstract

The purpose of my research is to investigate music-making as discursive practice, focusing on amateur musicians in English folk clubs. This is intended to support my thesis that music-making can be usefully characterised as intersubjective practice, whereby musicians and participants acquire and reaffirm a sense of social and communal identity through involvement and interaction within the symbolic world of the music event.

My objective is to contribute towards popular music scholarship by focusing on music-making at a grass-roots level and showing the value of analysing this seemingly peripheral domain in enhancing our understanding of popular music culture. By using Christopher Small's (1998a, 1998b) concept of 'musicking' as a central reference point, my analysis is based on a methodological framework of symbolic interactionism, drawing on the works of Harold Garfinkel (1967) and Erving Goffman (1959, 1961b, 1963), to map out a series of object-signs as constituent elements of the intersubjective domain of the folk club. By applying this approach to case study analyses, interview responses and direct observation, this study reveals the internal relations and dynamics of signification and identification that gave shape to amateur music-making as discourse. This is complemented by recognition of external discursive frameworks – professionalism, popularism, regulation and the institutionalised English 'folk scene' – and their role in defining the cultural experience of sharing music in folk clubs. In this way, my thesis demonstrates the capacity of object-sign analysis to provide a more rigorous characterisation of amateur music discourse than one based solely on ethnographic description and interpretation.

The outcome of this research is a detailed perspective of 'musicking' as an experiential and cultural activity. It shows how amateur musicians and participants become subsumed within the discursive domain of folk clubs through sharing and recognising meanings invoked in musical (and social) performance. I conclude that the benefits of 'musicking' as a concept have not been sufficiently realised in popular music studies and that my research opens up possibilities for new and significant insights through its focus on intersubjective engagement with music as a focus for cultural practice and identity.

<u>Acknowledgements</u>

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Introduction – Making music: an intersubjective approach.

This thesis makes a case for the examination of music-making as an intersubjective social practice on the basis that such a study is capable of offering new insights into the role of music and, specifically, practices of musicians within popular culture. My research in particular focuses on the performance and sharing of music by musicians participating in English folk clubs and considers their activities as forms of socialisation, identity affirmation and role-play. The purpose of this investigation is to consider music and the practice of music-making as a basis for specific modes of interaction which both reflect and reinforce a set of meanings and understandings shared by participants of their identities and environment within that social situation.

In addressing questions of identity and intersubjectivity, my dissertation explores and applies a methodological framework in which the practices of musicians are regarded as '*performance*' in a broader social and interactive sense. As one might expect of research into folk clubs, this project acknowledges the vast body of work which focuses on music as folklore, viewed in historical and cultural terms as a traditional form of expression, captured from recordings of rural (and urban) performance and transcripts, and preserved and reinvigorated in a celebration of national and cultural identity. In addition, my study draws on ethnomusicology's interest in music as cultural expression and an indicator of cultural identity, accessed and identified through anthropological and ethnographic research. However, by applying an intersubjective perspective, this dissertation sets out an alternative approach to existing scholarly concerns of popular music as a cultural *product*, shaped and restructured by the conditions of post-industrial capitalism.

Central to my thesis is a concentration on music-*making* as practice rather than music as structural convention and text. In this respect, my dissertation examines and applies Christopher Small's concept of 'musicking' (Small 1987, 1998a) by considering music as a basis for social and cultural activity. It is the act of performance that is of interest here, alongside the fact that its *amateur* performers are sharing music in a non-commercial and self-sustaining environment, offering a space for cultural and artistic expression which

appears to be meaningful within its own terms of reference. One could argue that amateur musicians, sharing songs and tunes in a folk club, are in a position to construct their own social domain of shared understandings as a haven from the dominant ideology of popular culture and 'professionalised' production. Certainly, a view of music-making as a form of symbolic interactionism does point to such a domain as one structured by a set of meanings which constitute a sense of purpose and identity shared by participants.

However, critical analysis of the social practices and interactions of musicians in such an environment reveals that this domain is not immune to the presence and influence of a range of discourses which intersect at each moment of performance and provide substance to music-making as a specific mode of experience. Thus, the purpose of this research is to explore and attempt to define the practice of amateur music-making not only as meaningful cultural expression but also in terms of its engagement with particular discursive frameworks embedded within contemporary culture. Prominent among these are discourses associated with four interrelated cultural concepts:

i. <u>professionalism</u> in music production and performance, encompassing shared notions of quality and musical skills associated with 'professional' business practices and relationships, as opposed to less formalised 'amateur' arrangements or standards of practice;

ii. '<u>popularity</u>' as a defining concept for mainstream tastes and engagements with dominant generic forms and themes in music, and the construction and positioning of 'folk' music within such a framework in terms of its accessibility and appeal, in contrast with 'amateur' as specialist, non-conformist and potentially capricious or subversive;

iii. the <u>administrative-regulatory frameworks</u> underpinning the public performance of music in different types of venue, the ownership of copyright and the mechanisms of permission and governance, with a corollary view of the non-regulated 'amateur' as unsanctioned and unaccountable;

iv. the institutional phenomenon of the '<u>folk scene</u>' as a self-defining cultural entity with its own motivations, histories, aesthetic frameworks and spokespeople, in contrast with amateur music-making as a more fragmented, less cohesive and less strategic activity.

My own involvement in the 'folk scene' of Coventry and Warwickshire – as a performer, club organiser, writer and promoter[1] – has afforded me considerable advantage as a researcher, not only in developing insights from first-hand observation and use of contacts, but also in the potential of critical reflection of my own music-based practices. A characterisation of folk music as that which is primarily performed and shared by 'amateurs', and an understanding of its relationship with the institutionalised contexts of the music business, the legislative framework and popular culture, would seem achievable through a combination of ethnographic and participant observation and critical discourse analysis.

As a musician who has frequented and organised folk clubs for nearly 40 years, I was aware that the practices of music-making in such establishments by *non*-professionals are under-researched, even within the context of the fast-developing disciplines of ethnomusicology and popular music studies. By 'non-professionals', I am referring to musicians who are motivated by social factors and personal interest and enthusiasm rather than commercial ambitions. Such practices include the gathering of music enthusiasts to take part in (or just listen to) folk music sessions and folk club 'singarounds' and 'singers nights'. The 'back room' world of amateur music, as a form of social and culturally rooted practice, clearly offers some interesting and complex territory to be explored. That part of the 'folk scene' that exists on a self-sustaining basis, unofficial, run by volunteers and enthusiasts, is a potential source of valuable insight for the researcher of sociology, cultural theory, ethnomusicology, folklore or a range of other academic disciplines. As a locus of interaction through the performance of music, it may provide a wealth of observations for academic debate and interpretation.

To some extent, precedents have been set for the scholarly analysis of folk clubs. In mapping out the domain of the English folk club circuit and the development of the

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[1] Under the stage name of 'Pete Willow', I have performed in numerous groups and organised folk clubs and concerts in and around Coventry since 1975. I have written a weekly article on local folk music for Coventry's daily newspaper, the Coventry Telegraph, since 1983. I am also an Assistant Director for the Warwick Folk Festival and work on the promotion of this event and of Bromyard Folk Festival.

practices and routines of its participants, this study draws on the relatively restricted but insightful range of contemporary research that has focused on this territory; in this context, the term 'contemporary' is applied to the period from the 1970s to the present day, and thus within living memory of many current folk club aficionados. Like my own study, some of this research is built on a foundation of personal experience and engagement with folk clubs, for example, John L. Smith's (1987) ethogenic analysis of performances in a folk club that he organised in Sunderland and Fay Hield's (2010) more recent doctoral study of folk clubs in South Yorkshire from her perspective as a practising and professional folksinger. Niall MacKinnon's (1993) frequently cited study of British folk clubs in the 1990s offers a means of comparison with present-day folk clubs, alongside Ruth Finnegan's anthropological research into music-making in Milton Keynes (1989 and 2007) which includes folk clubs as objects of her study of 'hidden' structures, common to a range of music-making activities, such as orchestras, brass bands and operatic societies. Folk club practices and histories also form a significant part of Michael Brocken's (2003) critical thesis on the 'folk revival' in Britain. He also seeks to address the relative paucity of scholarly interest in folk music as a contemporary cultural phenomenon, but cites Richard Middleton's (1990) and Philip V.Bohlman's (1988) interdisciplinary and cross-cultural approaches to the study of folk as an expressive form of music, rather than an encapsulation of histories and traditions.

Research into the practices of music-making within an amateur setting opens up specific questions on the role of music as a cohesive force, a focus for collective identity, and a form of cultural production at a grass-roots level. Such questions have the potential to provide understandings of lived culture in ways that could not be achieved so readily through macro-sociological analysis or cultural criticism. Anthropological studies of folk music also offer alternative perspectives from those that may be derived from focus on the text, content or structures of the songs and tunes themselves as evidence of cultural expression, for example through the research frameworks of ethnomusicology.

However, my concern – and the contribution I would hope to offer to popular music scholarship – is less with 'folk music' as a social and historical object of study, and more with interactions within the amateur folk music communities themselves plus the meanings that

are derived from these: to put it another way, less with music as a *thing* and more with music as a *practice*. Within the specific and peculiar setting of the folk club, the possibility exists of understanding the practice of music-making through the observation and interpretation of participants' interactions and behaviours. From such a study, one may postulate a meaningful framework of ideas and terms of reference, shared by those participants, and constituting a definable discourse in the sense proposed by Michel Foucault - 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak' (Foucault 1972, p.49). The practices and statements of amateur musicians, thus, articulate a mode of experience, a set of relationships and a sense of identity. Rather than present a case for the role and contribution of folk music within current structures of contemporary and popular music, my research seeks to consider the impact of these structures – and other discursive frameworks – on the discourse of amateur music-making within the folk club environment.

Therefore, the underlying question addressed by this dissertation is: *what are the characteristics of amateur music (as performed in English folk clubs) as discourse?* Clearly, the concept of discourse provides a cardinal analytical thread; a consideration of performances and consumption of amateur music as discursive practices should arguably indicate how folk clubs and music sessions define relationships and interactions between their participants. These relationships are primarily and fundamentally *social* and not regarded in any deterministic sense as a product of 'the folk scene' as a broader community or institution. Nevertheless, having established a characterisation of 'amateur music' discourse, it should also be possible to examine the cross-references and tensions between this and the professional, bureaucratic and 'popular' media discourses of mainstream music production and consumption, plus the institutional discourse of the 'folk scene' as a recognised and established cultural phenomenon.

Pivotal to my thesis is the 'amateur' status of musicians who support and take part in folk clubs. My observations of their interactions and social performances reveal that, while their music-making may be viewed primarily as a social activity, in which like-minded people bond, express their creativity, or simply 'escape' from the rigours of working life, the event itself remains by necessity embedded within the discursive frameworks of professionalism and notions of 'the popular'. One could argue that 'amateur' and 'professional' are concepts

which define themselves as antithetical to each other, but it is evident in the 'real world' of folk clubs (and in many other circumstances in which people come together to make music) that these are not absolute concepts but value-laden. Applied to music, the connotations of 'amateur' are widely shared and include notions of enthusiasm, inexperience, lack of finesse and emphasis on performance as a communal act rather than a rehearsed presentation. Essential qualities of amateur music-making events observed in this study are their informality and potential for spontaneity.

The events are predicated on the notion of a social gathering of friends who simply want to share their music. However, when their performances – musical and social – are observed and interpreted as instances of symbolic interaction, a contextual framework of meanings becomes apparent, one that is based on routine, etiquette, ritual, appropriate role-play and identity, and one which provides a cultural locus for shared values, shared histories, shared tastes, and shared notions of creativity. While my motivation as a researcher of amateur music-making as a cultural practice has been to reveal the discursive underpinnings of such events, the methodology of critical discourse analysis of folk clubs, based on ethnographic study and rich description, runs a risk of producing anecdotal narratives which may or may not be typical but would almost certainly be inconclusive. The heuristic key to the framework of meanings is the concept of intersubjectivity in the sense that has been associated with participant observation and anthropological research by the so-called 'Chicago School' (Prus 1996). Through recognition of how participants' sense of propriety, community and identity stems from the sharing of this framework of meanings, a more tangible and analytical perspective of amateur music-making becomes feasible.

Therefore my concern with the characterisation of amateur music-making as discourse, when considered from this methodological perspective, raises a further question: *can such characteristics be ascertained through examination and analysis based on an intersubjective approach?*

My suggestion here is that the apparently spontaneous and self-motivated activities of amateur musicians are defined and, to a significant extent, regulated by discursive and ideological schema which stem from – and reaffirm – a set of meanings generated through

symbolic interactionism. By identifying and mapping out the areas where internal 'amateur' discourses and external regulatory discourses intersect, I hope to demonstrate that this methodological approach can offer a distinctive and productive contribution to ongoing discussion and debate on popular music-making as a form of cultural production.

To view music as 'object' severs its link with cultural experience and human action. To view music as 'practice' brings us closer to an understanding of its cultural significance but still implies a restricted ethnological process of recording observations. My case is that the performance and sharing of music is best understood when viewed as 'intersubjective practice'.

<u>Structure and rationale</u>

As with any exploration, a conceptual map is needed to establish what is already known of the territory. Chapter 1 begins with some reflections on Small's concept of 'musicking', which constitutes a central thread to my analysis of amateur music-making. Then, in view of the relative paucity of research into the world of music-making in English folk clubs, the chapter attempts to map this terrain at two levels. Firstly, clear terms of reference are needed to attempt definition of the objects of study: 'folk' as a musical concept, the 'folk revival' as a dominant interpretation of its development, 'folk clubs' as observed places and events, and the 'folk circuit' or in slightly broader terms, the 'folk scene' as a defining context. I use the word 'attempt' because – as this chapter demonstrates – such terms defy any singular process of categorisation or shared understanding and, as signifiers, have become loci for debate, contention and vested interests.

Secondly, the terms of debate and modes of understanding of the significance of 'folk' as a cultural phenomenon also need to be understood. A critical review of literature – books, journal articles and electronic publications – serves this purpose and further demonstrates a range of divergent perspectives and concerns represented by their authors. Thus Chapter 1 also indicates that an inevitable corollary to the ambiguity of the concept of 'folk' is that there are disparities in the viewpoints adopted by those who have studied it. Rather than set out a range of differing conclusions drawn from published research, it becomes clear

that the nature of the questions raised by researchers and commentators are themselves considerably diverse, reflecting differing interests and discursive constructions of their objects of study.

Having established a foundation, albeit an unsettled one, of working concepts and issues, the next stage of this dissertation is establish my own position as a researcher and my own 'construction' of what is being researched. Chapter 2 sets out the methodological framework within which observations, responses and statements are gathered and interpreted. The discussion here is again presented in two parts. Firstly it sets out a rationale for the theoretical stance adopted for this research, taking into account the instrumental and epistemological issues that arise from ethnographic research. The discussion opens up to consider debates surrounding two distinctive but, for this thesis, related theoretical concepts: discourse theory and symbolic interactionism. From this discussion I develop a case for achieving an understanding of amateur music-making as a discursive practice by applying an analytical framework drawn from the Chicago School's approach to symbolic interactionism as a means of interpreting observations and experience.

The second part of this chapter describes the practicalities of studying amateur musicians at folk clubs and reflects on my personal experience as a 'folk' practitioner. Here I address the methodological issues arising from my own direct involvement in relation to the authority and credibility of my conclusions.

Chapter 3 launches an investigation into the field of study by paying an initial visit to each of the three case study folk clubs selected for analysis, to establish the issues and territory to be explored: Warwick Folk Club, The Tump Folk Club and Sly Old Dogs and Friends. This chapter offers a characterisation of each, based on observation, participation and interview responses, with the intention of establishing an overview of the territory of interaction before it is examined in greater depth. This is followed by a discussion on the rationale behind the choice of these venues as case studies.

The analytical framework adopted in this research is applied in Chapter 4 which seeks to identify indicators of how behaviours and statements by participants, and interactions

between them, serve to map out and reinforce a set of meanings and identities appropriate to – and reflexive of – the social event of music-making. Hence the broad theoretical focus of this chapter is symbolic interactionism, which provides a hermeneutic basis for the critical discourse analysis. A specific analytical tool applied here is the concept of *object-signs*. This entails an attempt to examine, in detail, the 'world' of amateur music-making in folk clubs as an experience, the fabric of which constitutes a number of distinctive elements which convey particular meanings to participants of that world. Whilst this analysis is framed within symbolic interactionist theory, it provides a basis for interpreting amateur music-making as discourse by indicating how a specific set of practices surrounding the performance of music reflects particular modes of representation and social relationships.

Chapter 5 explores further the discursive nature of amateur music-making within the folk clubs under observation, by considering the influence of external, contextual discourses of professionalism, regulation, popular culture and the institutionalised folk community. By seeking to identify areas where these discourses intersect – and areas of discursive conflict and tension – this chapter aims to delineate a distinctive amateur music discourse, shaped and defined by a set of practices and expectations which are idealised within the terms of that discourse (based on notions of 'real' people playing 'amateur' music as a form of social and cultural practice) and then distorted to reflect externally sourced power relationships.

The conclusion of this study consists of a reflection on the value of subjecting amateur music-making and folk clubs in particular to this form of analysis. Here I consider the findings and interpretations of this research in the light of questions and concerns arising from the study of popular music as cultural practice. Having determined that the 'back room' world of folk clubs and music sessions has received scant attention in this area of research, it is worth noting that the construction of such 'amateur' events reflects a significant degree of irony in our perspective of music as a form of cultural expression. Perceptions of music-making at such a 'grass roots' level suggest a bench mark for authenticity and an unrefined source of 'genuine' cultural experience but, at the same time, such music-making practices are regarded as peripheral to those of the culture industries and marginalised in terms of popular taste and perceived relevance.

Chapter 1 – Definitions and discursive concepts

Chapter 1.1: Establishing terms of reference

Just as the analysis of music-making as discursive practice involves, in essence, identifying and defining the meaningful 'terms of reference' that shape the experience of the participants, the process of analysis as an *academic* practice also requires working definitions of discursive concepts which provide the context for music-based activities. For the purposes of this research, the most significant and dominant concepts that require close examination are those of 'folk', 'folk clubs' and 'the folk scene'. These are terms which are inherently discursive; they are widely used but rarely defined – at least with any sense of unanimity – by people who identify themselves as fans of folk music, or associate themselves with a folk community or movement. As I will show, they also connect to a particularly important concept of the 'amateur' musician. Discussion of these terms, combined with some attempt to understand the ways in which they are viewed by scholars of popular music, is a vital element in the development of my own study, especially bearing in mind the discussion I present in Chapter 2.3 on my position as a participant-observer. As someone who is familiar with – and immersed within – the discourse of amateur music, I share an implicit understanding of such terms with my fellow participants. However, it is necessary for me as an academic researcher to deconstruct the ideas that are embedded within, and give shape to, this discourse.

Associated with these dominant concepts are additional terms which frequently find expression within folk dialogue, again perceived as self-evident truths rather than products of discourse. Two of particular interest to me are 'the folk revival' and 'authenticity', which in turn have a strong link to the notion of 'amateur' within music practice. Both have been the subject of considerable scholarly enquiry and often form part of the rationale behind the choice of repertoire by amateur musicians in folk clubs, their style of performance and the symbolic values underpinning the sharing and appreciation of songs and tunes among folk club participants.

The intention behind this chapter therefore is to establish a framework for interpreting 'folk' and its related concepts as the type of musical practice applied as a case study for this research. As part of the development of my overall argument, this interpretation is based partly on interviewee statements and accounts of current practices in English folk music but mainly entails the identification and review of scholarly work that has engaged with these concepts from a range of perspectives. The process of literature review is not confined to this chapter and also plays a central role in my subsequent discussion of methodological practices in Chapter 2 and in my application of an interpretive framework in Chapters 4 and 5.

Before addressing terminology specific to folk as a genre and practice, I will return to Small's (1998a, 1998b) concept of 'musicking', and explore my engagement with it in greater depth. Chapter 1.2 indicates its influence in my conceptualisation of amateur music from the beginning of this undertaking through its focus on participants' dynamic and social engagement with the act of music performance. I turn my attention in Chapter 1.3 to contrasting perspectives on the concept of 'folk' as a musical style, a set of practices and a history. Chapter 1.4 focuses on institutional concepts: the 'folk scene' in general and folk clubs in particular. Chapter 1.5 explores relationships between the idea of the amateur musician and the repertoire of musicians in the context of debates on authenticity, essentially raising questions on how their music is rooted in a sense of the 'real'.

Chapter 1.2: 'Musicking'

I first encountered the concept of 'musicking' at a training session in community arts. The all-day 'workshop' (for want of a better name) was part of a 'Folk Industry Focus Day' which was organised by Folk Arts England and took place in Nottinghamshire in November 2007.[2] 'Roots Into The Community' was advertised as 'everything you need to plan and deliver a successful community arts project'. The session was run by Marilyn Tucker and Paul Wilson, respectively Artistic Director and Music Director for Wren Music, a folk and community arts charity based in Devon. With the two of them and five delegates seated around the table, we embarked on a serious discussion on the relationship between folk music and community activity.

Underpinning the session was an exploration of how folk music can be a catalyst for social action. The morning's activities followed a conventional workshop format; Marilyn and Paul talked us through examples of their projects and led a discussion on how to set up a community arts project. The format changed dramatically after lunch however when they staged a music session as an illustration of how a community workshop might be run. Each of us was invited to take up a musical instrument that we had never played before (in my case, a violin) and Paul taught us each a few bars of melody or rhythm. We each played our piece, at first individually and then simultaneously. The pieces fitted together to form one musical composition and we discovered to our pleasure that we had the rudimentary makings of a folk 'orchestra'. As Paul pointed out, we had participated in a practical demonstration of 'musicking'.

The term was coined by the late Christopher Small. He used it in his exploration of the influence of Afro-American music in Western culture (1987, 1998a) in which he set out a working assumption that '*music is not primarily a thing or a collection of things, but an activity in which we engage*' (Small 1998a, p.50 – author's italics). His emphasis on music as activity resulted in his use of the word as a verb with 'musicking' as its present participle:

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[2] <http://www.musicleader.net/uploads/documents/doc_426.pdf>

> In order to narrow the gap that is assumed to exist between performers and listeners in European musicking, I define the word to include not only performing and composing (what is composition but the preparation of material for performance?) but also listening and even dancing to music; all those involved in any way in a musical performance can be thought of as musicking. (Small 1998a, p.50)

Musicking was itself the title of Small's final book in which he stated provocatively that '(t)here is no such thing as music' (1998b, p.2). He called for a reconceptualisation of music, not as a 'thing', a collection (or hierarchy) of compositions, or indeed as a one-way performance in which the performer's role is to mediate between composer and listener while the listener's role is – to listen. Small described what he regarded as 'a severe misunderstanding of what actually takes place in a performance' (1998b, p.7), based on a perception that the meaning of music is located in the composed objects whose existence is testimony of the creative act of the composer. He even proposed that the verb 'to music' should also be applied to seemingly more peripheral activities associated with music-making, such as selling tickets for a concert or setting up musical equipment on a stage.

For Small, if one seeks to ascertain the meaning of music, it is found in places where the 'act of musicking' establishes an often complex set of relationships – 'between person and person, between individual and society, between humanity and the natural world and even perhaps the supernatural world' (1998b, p.13) – and he sought to demonstrate this through the deconstruction of a musical event, namely a symphony concert, although such an exercise could be applied just as productively to a jazz club, rock festival or church service.

This way of understanding music-as-practice seems to encapsulate a concept that is key to the territory of amateur music-making explored in my research. While the term 'musicking' has clear benefits for applied scholarship in such areas as cognitive therapy (e.g. Pavlicevic 2003, Pavlicevic and Ansdell 2004), or education (e.g. Jorgensen 2003, Kelly 2009), its focus on interpersonal and social relationships suggests a particular resonance for the study of folk music as performed in the informal settings of folk clubs, pub music sessions and similar settings for amateur music-makers. The concept of 'musicking' bears some similarities with that of 'discourse', in its focus on practice and relationships. Its application makes it possible

to conflate several perspectives in the act of making music: its outcome (the performance), text (the composition), meaning (both denotative and connotative, shared by composers, performers, audiences – or indeed contested by these parties!), rhetorical impact (the feelings and emotive responses that it invokes), aesthetic-creative qualities (as perceived through such responses), and intersubjective impact (its capacity to constitute a focus for social action and identity). The concept is also capable of embracing the promotion of cultural identity in composition (through its arrangements and manipulation of generic forms), in performance (through reaffirmation of cultural practice) and in reception (through culturally-specific readings, interpretation and recognition).

Nevertheless, as Small is keen to insist, any conceptualisation of music that seeks to objectify it – to reduce it to the status of 'composition' or 'performance' or 'thing'– masks the more abstract and transcendent, but nevertheless vitally functional role of music in human experience:

> It is only by understanding what people do as they take part in a musical act that we can hope to understand its nature and the function it fulfills (*sic*) in human life. Whatever that function may be, I am certain, first, that to take part in a music act is of central importance to our very humanness, as important as taking part in the act of speech, which it so resembles (but from which it also differs in important ways), and second, that everyone, every normally endowed human being, is born with the gift of music no less than with the gift of speech. (Small 1998a, p.8)

The practice, the participating, the 'doing' that is implicit in the term 'musicking' thus points to the essentially experiential aspect of the relationships that it creates among its composers, performers and listeners. Music as a 'thing' may have emotion embedded in its meaning, but 'musicking' as a practice has meaning embedded in the emotions it creates and the sense of shared identity that it engenders. Arguably, through the act of 'musicking', a folk club 'regular' or a folk musician or fan may discover or reaffirm that identity by sharing, intersubjectively, the emotions and the meanings embedded within them.

Chapter 1.3: 'Folk' – exploring the contested territory

In keeping with Small's preference of 'musicking' as 'a ritual in social space' (Small 1995) over 'music' as a composed object, my research focuses on those practices of people who participate in music-making when visiting folk clubs. My interest is not especially directed at skilled or fully professional musicians, although they are clearly part of the world that I am exploring, but to 'amateurs' in the literal sense of musicians who love to play, no matter how skilled they may be or whether or not they expect to receive any payment. I am interested in the meanings that are derived and shared from such visits. And because folk clubs are places where amateur musicians gather to take part in singers' nights, singarounds, sessions or other adopted formats, such clubs – and the 'folk scene' that they inhabit – provide the physical, social and discursive territory for my study.

However, as the case study analysis will demonstrate, the very term 'folk' is one that eludes consensus. Understandings of what constitutes 'folk music' appear to be varied and personal, with some definitions referring to repertoires and genres, others to authenticity and others still to the practices and conventions of the clubs themselves. The following extracts transcribed from responses to a social media survey conducted for this research (see pages 99-102) illustrate such variances:

> What is a folk club? Is it one where people sit quietly and listen to a talented performer, or one where like-minded musicians get together to play music with each other and inspire and challenge each other? I've been to both - and sometimes it's been at the same venue, on the same evening. (Facebook Survey 1)

> Could you please not categorise the subject by the singular labelling of the word 'folk'? If the discussion has to be entered into, in the spirit of music, then it needs to cover all genres of music, and not just one of many. Music venues will always have good bad and indifferent performance levels, yet I can remember recently a young lad of fifteen at a folk event with a big double bass slapping out a 1930s jazz number in an early rock style, that blew me away. He was not the best singer. He was not the best musician. But he had the magic ingredients, stage presence and an attitude of loving what he was doing. (Facebook Survey 1)

People who are happy to regard themselves as folk enthusiasts or 'folkies' do not share a simple or singular definition of the term; this makes it all the more interesting to establish the basis for a discourse of amateur music-making when studying the actions and interactions of people who take part in events that are identified and promoted as 'folk' clubs or sessions. One might expect the term to define the nature of the social experience but the meanings associated with that experience appear to be based on a very loose conception of 'folk' and varying levels of commitment to the concept. Comments by organisers of the case study folk clubs, transcribed during the field research for this thesis (see pages 96-9), serve to support this point:

> I don't really have a clear definition of folk. Because I'm a bit of a late starter – I'm only nine in folk terms – so I don't have the same background as a lot of people who've been involved for longer... We're quite happy to have a mixture of styles although probably some people would quibble if we're a 'folk' club … some sing songs with a traditional 'folkie' feel and others with a modern 'pop' feel and then a lot of people do covers, such as 60s-type music. (Karen Orgill – The Tump Folk Club)

> It's music that can be sung by a person. And that pretty much means it could be anything. 'Anything that can be played on an acoustic guitar' – I've heard as a definition, which I would go along with as well … Some people say it's traditional music, in quotes, but then what is 'traditional'? I thought *House of the Rising Sun* was traditional but then I found out who wrote the words. If we don't know who it was, it's 'traditional' but people can write songs in traditional style and it can sound like a traditional song … Luckily, the club I'm involved with – we don't get too much bothered about definitions. Pretty much anything goes – any kind of song that anyone can get up and sing successfully with whatever instrument they choose goes down fine. (Norman Wheatley – Warwick Folk Club)

The openness and indulgence indicated in these responses may be surprising when one considers that they have been made by organisers of two well-established venues, which regularly book guest artists with good reputations on the national and sometimes international folk circuits. From my own experience as organiser of several folk clubs, concerts and festival events and participant in the 'Sly Old Dogs and Friends' music sessions, I have adopted a working definition of folk music in an attempt to reflect a style

and consensus for musicians who take part in 'folk' events: *folk music is music that reflects the genuine experiences, histories, aspirations and cultures of different groups of people*. Sly Old Dogs' repertoire (see Chapter 3.1) is made up largely of songs and tunes that can be identified by their origin, such as Irish or Scottish traditional ballads, fishing songs from Grimsby or English songs expressing the experiences of war or poverty. The band also performs 'crowd-pleasers' from the set lists of many popular Irish folk acts such as *The Black Velvet Band*, *The Irish Rover* and *Whiskey In The Jar*. Others are more contemporary, sourced from known songwriters, such as Ewan McColl's *Hot Asphalt,* Leon Rosselson's *The World Turned Upside Down* or John Tams' *Rolling Home*. Most of the songs performed by Sly Old Dogs reflect my definition of folk in that they tell stories reflecting the life experiences of working people in the past and present.

However, while such a definition may be in keeping with the repertoire of some folk events, it remains just one of many voices on the topic. The point here is that the definitions or reflections on folk music offered by organisers of the case study clubs study may provide insight into their motivation and agenda for social interaction. Their responses indicate an all-encompassing and liberal approach to the type of music actually played combined with a lack of concern about whether 'folk music' can be, or should be, defined anyway. This is in keeping with a perspective and motivation for the club to function as an open rather than exclusive event. At organisations like The Tump and Warwick Folk Clubs, folk as a 'style' is rarely (if ever) used as a filtering mechanism to determine the permitted repertoires of musicians. Furthermore, the socialisation and 'community' aspect of the event appears to take precedence over any concerns on the part of the organisers to maintain or preserve traditional music.

Other sources reflect a wide range of positions in their definitions of 'folk music'. This is apparent in Neff's (1996a) online summaries of her doctoral research into media usage in American folk music communities (Neff 1996b). Those that she cites include definitions that reflect the practice of performance and circulation of folk music, for example, a statement by folksinger Pete Seeger:

> The term 'folk music' was invented by nineteenth-century scholars to describe the music of peasantry, age-old and anonymous. Nowadays it covers such a multitude of sins as to be

almost meaningless. To me it means homemade-type music played mainly by ear, arising out of older traditions but with a meaning for today. I use it only for lack of a better word. Similarly, I have had to accept the label 'folksinger', although 'a professional singer of amateur music' would be more accurate in my own case. (Seeger 1972, p.5, cited in Neff 1996a)

Other sources place emphasis on the provenance and transmission of the musical compositions:

The music must be very old; that it is a particular style of music; that the author is not known. An art song is one that is written by a trained composer and is passed on in written form, whereas a folk song is one which is passed on in the oral tradition rather than in written form (Nettl and Myers 1976, cited in Neff 1996a).

...music that has been submitted to the process of oral transmission. It is the product of oral transmission. It is the product of evolution and is dependent on the circumstances of continuity, variation and selection. (Karpeles, 1955, pp.6-7)[3]

Neff also discusses Forcucci's (1984) view that 'the folk singer's art is storytelling' but with the responsibility of 'telling the story rather than entertaining the audience' (cited in Neff 1996a). She explains how his analysis reappraises the foundation of folk music on the basis that oral transmission is no longer a distinctive, defining characteristic; most people encounter folk songs and tunes via the mass media. Hence, Forcucci places folk music into the categories of traditional folk songs and modern urban folk songs and proposes a wide ranging approach to defining them as folk compositions, which takes into account their source, forms of lyrical expression, structure, performance and instrumentation.

British folk performer and researcher, Fay Hield (2010) acknowledges the 'problematic' history of the usage of the term 'folk'. She describes the 'folk' observed and interviewed in her research as sharing 'a musical behaviour' (2010, p.3) before veering, arguably, towards

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[3] citing the definition adopted by The International Folk Music Council at its Annual Conference in London in 1952.

tautology when she states that the behaviour of her research subjects is 'bounded by their participation in activities that are described as "folk"' (*ibid*). This nevertheless functions as a working definition for her doctoral research:

> ... the term 'folk' is applied to a body of material collected at a time when a particular stratum of society was labelled 'the folk'. The contexts for the re-performance of this material became known as 'folk clubs' and 'folk festivals'. Other songs performed in these settings have become absorbed into the category of 'folk song', including genres of protest song and some contemporary song writing. (Hield 2010, p.3)

Her methodological approach, based on grounded theory, explores the notion of a 'community' constructed by folk singers in present-day England; hence she relies on the perspectives of her respondents to articulate a shared understanding of 'folk' not only as a genre but also as a social movement based on collective and self-defining practice. As she explains, 'the folk singers under study here are bounded in community through the practice of singing an elusive body of songs on which they have placed significance' (Hield 2010, p.44). The image of 'community' evoked in her study is in keeping with a conception of folk music as belonging to, and shared by, people as an expression of their lived experience, as opposed to 'popular' music as a commodity and conveyor of ersatz experience, constructed for mass market consumption. While 'community' itself may be regarded as a discursive construction embedded within a system of representations and perceived social relationships, the concept nevertheless offers more focused insight into the values and symbolic associations of the 'folk movement', as a cultural phenomenon, than could be derived from a definition of 'folk music' as a genre alone. While the repertoire and performance style of folk may be understood as the product and object of (in Bourdieu's terms) a specific 'taste community' (Bourdieu, 1984a, pp.101-2), it is through the social practices of the folk community that we are able to find evidence of its discursive impact on amateur music-making at specific events that are presented and promoted as folk clubs.

This point is reinforced by Matthew Bannister who argues from a Foucauldian perspective that 'genre can never be divorced from questions of distinction, social capital and power' (Bannister 2006, p.58).

Music of the people – folk as popular culture

The activity of reviewing scholarly literature on folk music reveals an irony in defining the object of study as, to quote Woody Guthrie, 'music of the people, by the people and for the people'[4] (McGraw-Hill n.d.) – in a very literal sense, 'popular' music. A clear paradigmatic distinction exists between an extensive body of research on 'folk' music as a phenomenon drawn from, or steeped in tradition (e.g. Pickering 1982, Russell and Atkinson 2004, or in the United States, Bohlman 1988, Nettl 1965) and research, especially since the 1980s, into 'popular' music as a product of a cultural industry (e.g. Frith 1988, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c, Hesmondhalgh 1996, 1998, Toynbee 2000, Wall 2003). Both approaches agree on the notion of music as a form of cultural expression but much of the history of research into folk has veered towards anthropology and the study of 'folklore' while the concept of 'culture' in studies of 'popular' music is often aligned with post-Marxist conceptions, following a trajectory established by Adorno's (1941, 1991) interests in the agencies and practice of cultural production of music as a commodity (see Witkin 1998 and 2002).

Hesmondhalgh and Negus (2002) identify 1981 as the year that popular music 'began to emerge as a recognisable field of academic study…with the establishment of the International Association for the Study of Popular Music and the launch of the academic journal *Popular Music*' (2002, p.3). While folk music's place as a style and influence is acknowledged in some studies of the 'popular' (see for example Kassabian 1999, pp.116-7; Bennett 2001, p.24; Wall 2003, pp.30-1), a cursory browse through the journal suggests that rock, jazz, hip hop, punk and, in particular, blues are more likely to attract scholarly attention as 'popular' forms of music. A view of folk music as an expression of past histories, cultural experiences and aspirations has underpinned its essence as 'folklore' and its capacity to provide an archive of the past to be preserved by self-appointed guardians of 'tradition' in the present. It has also reinforced an alienation of folk music within academic discourses of popular music, effectively separating it out from contemporary genres by presenting it as a signifier of cultures past rather than culture present. Graeme Smith (1997)

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[4] *The New York Times*, 7th July 1971, credits Louis Armstrong with the famous statement, 'All music is folk music. I ain't never heard a horse sing a song.'

begins his review of three contemporaneous books addressing aspects of folk music practices and representations, (Cohen 1995, Cantwell 1993, Laing and Newman 1994) by criticising what he describes as a 'long stand-off' between popular music studies and folk in the 1980s and 1990s. For him, this was exemplified by a representation of folk, in the first issue of the *Popular Music*, as 'hopelessly romantic, a bourgeois distortion and containment of subaltern musical forms' (Smith 1997, p.127).

This romanticised notion of the origins of traditional folk songs is also implicit in Jason Toynbee's statement that '(f)olk music flourishes in pre-industrial societies and lingers on in more economically developed ones ... reproduced through an oral tradition of repeated performance with slow changes in form and style' (Toynbee 2000, xviii). Kassabian (1999) reflects on a similar construction of folk in her discussion on popular culture's place within the educational curriculum. She contrasts one view of folk as 'popular' in the sense of 'home-made, unmediated, and possibly – though not always – unpolished, the art and culture of "the people"' (Kassabian 1999, p.116), with another perspective associated with a pre-industrial past in which folk is referred to as 'historical practices of small (often, by implication, rural) communities, such as folk music (e.g. shape note singing) or quilting and other forms of folk art' (*ibid*), as distinct from 'popular' in the sense of present-day cultural production intended for mass consumption. Either viewpoint appears to reinforce a positioning of folk within cultural studies as marginal to popular music as contemporary cultural expression.

Roy Shuker's approach to defining folk brings together considerations of practice and style. He highlights the historical grounding of folk as 'music that is passed from person to person or generation to generation without being written down' and then cites the *Music Central* CD-ROM's description of folk as '…simple, direct, acoustic-based music that draws upon experiences, concerns, and lore of the common people' (Shuker 2002, p.134). His understanding of the nature of folk music expresses a typical duality in popular conceptions of folk, i.e. music that is 'simple' in its style and performance, and music that harks back to 'simpler' times. The notion of folk as music that is (or has been) handed down through generations or shared within communities evokes a mythical construction of cultural

expression untainted by modernity and its associated practices of commodification and mass communication.

Inevitable issues of taxonomy arise from Shuker's discussion of 'folk culture'; the term 'folk' may encompass a variety of categories including world music, roots music, protest songs, songs identified by their regional origins and the output of contemporary singer-songwriters. Nevertheless, he offers a conceptualisation of music that reflects an 'authentic' identity and lived experience of a culture. Such music comprises songs that tell stories or relate histories and vernacular musical forms and structures that are distinctive to social, cultural or ethnic communities, such as the influence of traditional folk ballads on the contemporary singer-songwriter genre, pre-ska forms of Jamaican reggae, or hillbilly music as a precursor to country and western (*ibid*). In spite of these acknowledgements of the role of folk in the development of contemporary genres, discussions on the nature of folk music nevertheless locate its origins in communities of the past and hence establish discursive associations of folk music with 'tradition' and the collection and preservation of songs and tunes (and dances), a cultural repertoire that is (or was) a product of its collective community and not attributed to any named author or composer. Richard Middleton encompasses the notions of verisimilitude and history when he offers a common characterisation of folk music as 'the authentic expression of a way of life now past or about to disappear (or in some cases preserved or somehow revived)' (Middleton 1990, p.127).

In his discussion on the function of lyrics in popular songs, Simon Frith makes a similar point in his description of folk songs as 'a historical record of popular consciousness' (Frith 1988, p.112), and draws attention to Palmer's research of English folklore:

> ..Roy Palmer describes orally transmitted folk songs as 'the real voice of the people who
> lived in the past', and folk ballads as 'a means of self-expression; this was an art form truly
> in the idiom of the people'. (Frith 1988, citing Palmer 1974, pp.8 and 18)

A further dimension of the nature of folk songs appears in Frith's exposition when he refers to Albert L.Lloyd's description of songs as lyrical forms expressing the aspirations of common people (Frith 1988, citing Lloyd 1975, p.158). Aspirations and fantasies, expressed in folk songs, arguably provide as much insight into community identity as historical

narratives and reflect an 'authentic' provenance that distinguishes them from commodified, sentimental and banal fantasies in pop song lyrics. However, Frith offers a critique of the concept of authenticity in this context by raising questions on the ideological position reflected in this term. If we accept the argument that histories are products of ideological discourse, in which constructions of the past reflect and are shaped by values and priorities of the present, we may justifiably challenge the authenticity of music that we now classify as 'folk' on the basis that it is inevitably and irredeemably transformed by processes of selection, decontextualisation, preservation and reconstruction (for example, performed with modern instruments).

Folk and the discourse of tradition

The emergence and establishment of industrialised and urbanised social experience from the early 19th to the mid-20th century witnessed the development of bourgeois concerns to retain and preserve some essence of 'traditional' and usually rural culture. If the folksong is the metonym of 'tradition', the practice of collecting and preserving folksongs has itself developed as a cultural tradition with its own narrative, key moments and heroes. The modernist tools of the printing press and the phonograph became available to 'pin down the butterfly' of music and song, transmitted from peer-to-peer and from generation-to-generation, across and between communities and nations. The music was not only transformed by the technology of retrieval and archiving. The discourse of industrial capitalism, embodying the rational and efficient practices of organisation and categorisation, effectively constructed new 'texts' from the body parts of the old. The medium of the human voice became transplanted by words and stave on the page; the song became the simulacrum, evidence of its own past existence but reconstituted as an archive, a 'thing-to-be preserved', a component in a modernist construction of heritage.

Tim Wall summarises the impact of the American scholar, Francis James Child (1825-1896), who worked throughout the latter half of the 19th century[5] to anthologise and publish English and Scottish ballads from printed texts, manuscripts and private collections:

> [Child's] ideas became the basis of how intellectuals treated folk culture for the next hundred years. He saw his song collecting as an extension of his literary studies. Just like more recent histories of popular music he developed practices of collection, categorisation and analysis that were selective, constructing a story that expressed implicit values. (Wall 2003, p.30)

While 'Child ballads' are regularly identified and featured in contemporary folk repertoires, other key figures in the 'history' of British folk music are also credited for the preservation of traditional songs and tunes that may have otherwise been forgotten, and the incorporation of such material on contemporaneous musical compositions. Such figures include not only composers, such as Ralph Vaughan Williams, Percy Grainger and George Butterworth (Boyes 1993, p.50), but an army of 'collectors' – indeed rescuers – of songs, tunes and dances purportedly performed by 'common people' in a pre-industrial era. The practice of conserving such texts represented a historiography in which the songs, as artefacts, constituted bridges between a rational modernity and a construction of past life. Formed in 1898, the Folk-Song Society[6] comprised such published collectors as Kate Lee, Lucy Broadwood, Frank Kidson, the Reverend Sabine Baring-Gould and Cecil Sharp (of whom, more later). In his inaugural address to the Society, the composer Sir Hubert Parry articulated contempt for the commercialised popular music of the day, in particular songs of the music hall, as an expression of 'the sordid vulgarity of our great city populations' (Parry 1899, p.3 cited in Harker 1985, p.170). Parry's address, as a clarion call for the preservation of a heritage of folksong, is reminiscent of Matthew Arnold's crusade against philistine culture and an articulation of values that established a precedent for Leavisite cultural criticism.

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[5] Child's first publication of *English and Scottish Ballads* was in 1857-9. His first edition of *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* was published in Boston, 1882-98 (Harker 1985).

[6] Amalgamated with the English Folk Dance Society in 1932 to form the English Folk Dance and Song Society (EFDSS).

Arguably, the prevailing attitude that motivated the Society and the work of its members in the late 19th and early 20th centuries established an enduring ideological agenda which is still present in today's 'folk scene' as an institutionalised community. Paul Long summarises the 'discourse of folk' as:

> a reaction to modernity and the fears and sense of loss that attended the social changes of the Industrial Revolution. The rural focus indicated the discrete boundary dividing 'the folk' – who had generated the music and dance – and the modern proletariat. (Long 2011, pp.101-2)

The stance of 'folk' against the commodified outputs of the popular music industry was the theme of a public statement by radio presenter and author, Stuart Maconie during the 2012 BBC Radio 2 Folk Awards.

> We live in a culture where increasingly it seems, entertainment and mass popular music exist either to distract us, to massage the egos of the already rich and powerful, or to bolster the status quo however unfair that might be. Folk music ... comes from an entirely different place, a better place, of dissent, of compassion, of solidarity and of humanity. And popularity.[7]

Dave Harker (1985) characterised the mission of the Folk-Song Society as a response to the insidious influences of industrialisation, with its concomitant, vulgar popular culture, and to a fear of the potential extinction of an 'idealized "golden age" of pre-industrial rural bliss' (Harker 1985, p.171). Harker's critical Marxist perspective of bourgeois colonisation and reinvention of British folk songs is especially targeted at the work of Cecil Sharp (1859-1924) for his distortion and bourgeois sentimentalisation of English folk songs, 'collected' from rural singers and presented as authentic expressions of peasant culture (p.191).

Regarded as the most dominant figure in accounts of the 'revival' of folk music in the early 20th century, Sharp's name is canonised in the location of the English Folk Dance and Song

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[7] From Stuart Maconie's speech prior to presentation of Good Tradition award to Ian Campbell – Radio 2 Folk Awards, 8th February 2012.

Society[8], Cecil Sharp House. In his 1907 publication *English Folk-song: Some Conclusions*, Sharp set out a case for the generic distinction of folk music from other forms of popular music on the basis that the former is not a product of a known, creative individual composer but an expression of a community and, for English folk songs, a national culture. Sharp referred to the amorphous source of the songs that he collected as 'the common people', a non-educated 'peasantry' whose numbers had rapidly reduced to remote groups of people in country districts and who had 'escaped the infection of modern ideas' (1907, p.4). Sharp's 'scientific' definition of 'folk-song' was 'the song which has been created by the common people in contradistinction to the song, popular or otherwise, which has been composed by the educated' (1907, p.3 – see Harker 1985, pp.184-9).

The scale of Sharp's efforts to 'collect' folk songs and dances in England (mainly the county of Somerset) and Appalachian dances and tunes in the United States reflected a level of dedication, the motivation behind which became subject to heated debate and schism that remains to this day within the British folk community[9]. His enduring impact on the consciousness of the current 'folk scene' is characterised by Michael Brocken who argues:

> There is little doubt that Sharp and his devotees regarded folk song and dance as a powerful regenerative prescription for modern culture. By the adoption of an older, more authentic form of music (something they considered all but obliterated by the march of automation and the semi-literate masses) society could experience a musical, cultural and spiritual reawakening. (Brocken 2003, p.5)

Criticism of Sharp's apparent distortion of folklore to fit in with the bourgeois sentiments of his time became more pronounced in the 1970s and 80s. Former editor of *EFDSS Folk Music Journal*, Mike Yates comments:

> By the time the second revival began to kick-in (*sic*), Cecil Sharp was becoming somewhat marginalized. In order to preserve the songs, and to encourage people to sing them again, Sharp presented much of his material in arrangements that were suitable for singing by school-children. In other words, he bowdlerized some of the songs, removing some of the

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[8] EFDSS, founded in 1908 by Cecil Sharp as the English Folk Dance Society (Brocken 2003, p.5).

[9] See for example, thread 102365 in the Mudcat Café online discussion group: 'Folklore; The Imagined Village', <http://mudcat.org/thread.cfm?threadid=102364> (accessed 28th September 2012).

more explicit sexual references, and, by doing so, antagonized a number of people. (Yates 2003)

Yates recalls agreeing to include an article in the journal by Dave Harker in 1972, entitled *Cecil Sharp in Somerset - Some Conclusions* which criticised Sharp for misrepresenting the provenance of folksongs as music of 'the common people'. Yates quotes Harker's conclusion:

There you have it, 'folk song' as mediated by Cecil Sharp, to be used as 'raw material' or 'instrument', being extracted from a tiny fraction of the rural proletariat and to be imposed upon town and country alike for the people's own good, not in its original form, but, suitably integrated into the Conservatoire curriculum, made the basis of nationalistic sentiments and bourgeois values. (Harker 1972, cited in Yates 2003)

The article was a fore-runner of Harker's publication of *Fakesong* in 1985 in which he seeks to explode the myth that traditional songs and ballads are survivors of a pre-industrial, pre-capitalist society, rescued and preserved by well-meaning folklorists, arguing instead that they were mediated reconstructions reflecting a very specific world view. His criticisms are focused not only on Child and Sharp, but also the subsequent work of A.L.Lloyd (1908-1982). Harker recognises Lloyd's attempts to address the rural bias in Sharp's work through his interest in industrial songs as expressions of working class life experience and acknowledges that 'Lloyd's work does represent something of a *rapprochement* between the serious study of "folksong" and that of workers' history in England' (Harker 1985, p.231). He nevertheless accuses Lloyd of a superficial and romanticised understanding of working class culture, 'trailing a liberal-populist rhetoric' (p.251).

A similar criticism is levelled at Sharp by Georgina Boyes in her assertion that '(m)aking the vernacular arts fit bourgeois aesthetics was the basis of his career and the guiding spirit of the Revival which he built around it' (Boyes 1993, p.113). Her book, *The Imagined Village* (1993) chronicles the impact of the movement to revive folk music in Britain at the beginning of the 20th century and how the values of this movement survived to underpin the so-called 'second folk revival' from the 1950s to the present day. A central concept to her discussion is cultural 'survivals theory' which views the conservation of traditional texts, as

artefacts of past cultural experience, as more significant than performances of such texts, the contexts in which such performances took place and the creative processes involved in their production:

> ...by constructing the concept of a rural, uneducated, uncreative Folk as the cultural source of their definition, the proponents of the survivals thesis obviated the need for close examination of the role and individual contribution of performer of all folk traditions. (Boyes 1993, p.14)

Exemplified by the activities of Sharp and like-minded contemporaries, such an approach effectively draws a veil over the socio-cultural dynamics within which 'traditional' songs, tunes, dances, mummers plays and so on were created, and presents 'tradition' as a 'function not of origin but of continuance' (1993, p.12) and a 'history without record' (p.13). Boyes asserts that the mystification of the provenance of traditional texts can only be accessed through the specialist application of folklore scholarship which 'privileged hypothesised "historical forms" over the actuality of contemporary performances' (p.14).

Her argument concludes that survivals theory re-established its dominant position in the folk movement's revival, especially in the 1960s when the work of 19th century folklorists was rediscovered by new generations of folk enthusiasts. For Boyes, the revival was 'hidebound by historical theory' and '(d)eterminedly reproducing a policy of authenticity' (p.241). She targets her criticism of this particularly on Lloyd's publication of *Folk Song in England* in 1967, which appeared to accept Sharp's 1907 definition of folksong, and thus marked a change in Lloyd's thinking after he had previously dismissed survivals theory as 'a lot of dark anthropological hoo-ha':

> If this meant that 'Industrial Song', Lloyd's main innovation in the field, could not be counted as 'folksong proper', Lloyd reported himself content. The problem obviously lay with the genre of Industrial Song, rather than the formulation of any aspect of Sharp's theory. (Boyes 1993, p.241)

Critiques by Harker, Boyes and others have highlighted the process of collecting and 'rescuing' folksongs as positioned and ideological, saying more about bourgeois perceptions of folk-as-tradition than about the provenance of the songs themselves. Nevertheless, Sharp's enduring figurehead status within the folk community is evidenced by some

passionate defences of the spirit of the early revivalists and the momentum they produced for the rediscovery and preservation of traditional music and song. Some criticisms levelled at Harker, in particular, seek to undermine the viability of his argument by picking at methodological threads; a review by Carole Pegg (1987) of *Fakesong* criticises inconsistencies in Harker's argument and position while Bearman's (2002) critique of Harker's methodology accuses him of misrepresentations and factual errors.

The contentiousness within the folk community itself, on how its origins and purposes should be interpreted, offers a stark contrast with the quiet marginalisation of folk music within contemporary cultural studies. This may be characterised by defensiveness on the part of ardent folk revivalists seeking to preserve the integrity of folk tradition and its associated meanings which may be lost in a postmodern melting pot of pastiche musical forms, mash-ups and fusions. Boyes tempers her own criticisms of the artificiality of the folk tradition with acknowledgement that the motivation behind the work of Sharp and his followers was a genuine desire to preserve a cultural heritage rather than a deliberate, conscious and conspiratorial imposition of bourgeois ideology:

> Revival collectors' actions must, of course, be considered in the light of contemporary, rather than late twentieth-century attitudes. In such a highly stratified society, was what appears to us today as widespread exploitation – or at least patronisation of – performers necessarily felt to be so at the time? Were singers and dancers in fact, generally flattered by middle-class attention or gratified that their activities were considered worthy of publication? So little evidence of performers' reactions exist that we have no means of judging. (Boyes 1993, p.53)

Folk's institutional narrative – the phenomenon of revival

If history and tradition are common denominators in diverse understandings of folk as a concept, it would appear that debates on the nature of 'folk music' reflect differing allegiances to historical movements. Bearing in mind Frith's observation on defining folk history through 'a history of the struggle among folk collectors to claim folk meaning for themselves' (Frith 1988, p.113), it is sufficient at this stage to observe a lack of unanimity in

the characterisation of folk music among its researchers and practitioners, or indeed among its promoters and popular media. However, if we accept that the concept of folk is open to a range of positioned interpretations, it is possible that greater unanimity may be found in the understanding of dynamic processes that have driven the folk movement over the last hundred years. Literature produced by folklorists, ethnomusicologists, cultural theorists and indeed cultural commentators suggests agreement on a narrative for folk music, certainly in the UK, presented as a tale of two 'revivals'.

The phenomenon of music revivals is defined by Tamara Livingston as 'any social movement with the goal of restoring and preserving a musical tradition which is believed to be disappearing or completely relegated to the past' (Livingston 1999, p.68). She argues a twofold purpose: 'to serve as cultural opposition and as an alternative to mainstream culture, and ... to improve existing culture through the values based on historical value and authenticity expressed by revivalists' (*ibid*).

Carole Pegg (2007) summarises and contrasts the influences of 'folk music revivals' in Europe and the United States, which have established frameworks for understanding the concept but also for differences in perspective on the authenticity of music that claims to be 'folk'. She also points to the 'American folk revival' as one major influence in contemporary understandings and performance of folk music, describing this revival as one which:

> ...came out of the social and economic setting of the 1940s in which many young people
> believed that the parent generation had gravely mismanaged the world. Figures such as
> Pete, Mike and Peggy Seeger, and Alan Lomax, promoted engagement by college students
> and intellectuals in the ideas of populist folksong. (Pegg 2007)

In a similar vein, Frith's characterisation of the early American 'folk revival' in the 1940s and 50s is one of a backlash against 'urban corruption' and a return to 'rural romanticism' (1978, p.184) although he recognises the impact on this 'value utopianism' (*ibid)* of working class politics and the protest movement. This aspect is not confined to the content of folk songs but permeates the practice of their performance and distribution:

> The folk song movement was self-consciously opposed to mass music making and its values
> were developed in isolation from the usual practices of commercial pop. By the late 1950s

> this alternative was becoming attractive to an increasing number of young white listeners,
> as the energy and aggression of rock'n'roll were diffused in the banalities of teenage pop.
> Folk was a particularly attractive alternative for musicians unwilling to commit themselves
> to a life of apparent manipulation and exploitation by the pop moguls... (Frith 1978, p.185)

In contrast to the American experience, Pegg's history of the English folk movement reflects a widely shared perspective of two 'folk revivals'. As I have discussed, the first has been attributed to the collections of middle-class enthusiasts in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, while the second, according to Pegg's account, incorporated post-World War II socialist and Marxist movements, instigated by such figures as A.L.Lloyd and singer and songwriter, Ewan McColl (1915-89). Based on this commonly shared narrative, evidence by the Association of Festival Organisers to the British government's Culture, Media and Sport Committee's enquiry into funding of the arts and heritage alluded to the second, post-war folk revival. The Association argued that folk has been 'in revival' for many years, commenting that 'the music, dance and song and tradition of these islands has been with us for centuries but only since the 1950's has it had much public attention, since virtually dying out at the end of the 19th Century' (Culture, Media and Sport Committee 2011).

The notion of a second revival as a continuous cultural phenomenon since the 1950s is reformulated in accounts (Burns 2012, Sweers 2005, Young 2011) which associate a further revival with the emergence of electric folk and folk-rock while Yarwood and Charlton (2009) point to a 'current revival' through the work of a new generation of folk musicians, some of whom are children of established folk performers, now performing to a wider audience (2009, p.196).

MacKinnon (1993) offers an insider's perspective of the British 'post-revival' folk scene which focuses on ways in which folk musicians preserve and reinforce a hegemony of authenticity through the practices and processes of performing folk songs in particular and distinctive modes and styles. In contrast, Boyes (also 1993) characterises the concept of post-war revival as an attempt to preserve and reinforce the dominant bourgeois values of the early 20th century revival, associated with the mission of Cecil Sharp and his contemporaries to collect and archive folk songs in a spirit of cultural preservation.

Pegg identifies a subsequent distinction made by participants between 'traditional' and 'contemporary' folk music manifested through different styles of folk club, which 'began to develop "traditions" of their own' (Pegg 2007). The former incorporated 'vocal techniques and mannerisms considered to be intrinsic to a "traditional" style, such as singing nasally with the hand cupped over one ear…'; the latter reflected the influence of new acoustic guitar techniques, epitomised by Martin Carthy: 'sensitive finger-picking and open-string tunings that enabled drones to be produced' (*ibid*). MacKinnon also highlights a traditional-contemporary divide that became apparent in the folk club movement from the 1960s to the 1990s, although the distinction he draws is between 'authentic' British traditional music and international folk music, in particular American folk and blues. According to MacKinnon this conflict 'formed a tension, if not a schism, in the folk movement' (MacKinnon 1993, p.29) giving rise to two types of folk club and 'an enormous amount of introspective examination of artistic direction' (*ibid*).

The most recent detailed examination of the post-war revival phenomenon is Michael Brocken's doctoral thesis which he developed and published as *British Folk Revival 1944-2002* (2003). Putting aside Ben Harker's (2004) criticism that the study seems to ignore the revivalist movement in Scotland, with its particular resonances in national identity – or indeed any other part of the British Isles apart from England, as is pointed out in Milner's (n.d.) vociferous critique of his work – Brocken's analysis highlights the effect, as he sees it, of both revivals to distort the very thing that their exponents are claiming to revive. Citing Harker (1985) and Boyes (1993), he refers to 'the folk revival's practice of foregrounding rhetorical excellence over historical accuracy' (Brocken 2003, p.28). It is the type of observation that may touch raw nerves within an established folk movement operating through the auspices of such institutions as the English Folk Dance and Song Society, whose stated aims are 'to place the indigenous folk arts of England at the heart of our cultural life' (EFDSS online). Their work, alongside that of other traditional arts groups, is predicated on the notion of folk music as a form of authentic cultural expression that warrants protection from the insidious populist influences of modernism and commercialism:

> There has been a series of interrelated assumptions built into the basis (*sic*) language that
> we use for understanding the British folk revival: that a 'tradition' must be preserved at all

> costs; that specialists are 'qualified' in this respect; that performers are middle men
> carrying the tradition; that folk music is a universal language; that listeners can be divided
> into active folkies or passive music consumers (Brocken 2003, p.2).

Thus, from the beginning of his work, Brocken indicates the discursive nature underpinning the concept of 'revival' by referring to these assumptions as 'human constructions' and 'the products of social agency' (*ibid*).

One observation by Hield (2010) serves to illustrate how Brocken's' position may appear abrasive to folk practitioners fully immersed within the folk revival discourse. She takes issue with his comment that 'the meaning of folk song has become to "belong" to a certain cultural hierarchy of those who sought refuge in the self and an intellectualised echelon of antiquarian connoisseurs – a folk ruling class' (Brocken 2003, p.113) by claiming, presumably from her own experience as a performer, that 'those who engage in the particular social and musical context of the contemporary folk scene feel a sense of custodianship over the repertoire they have chosen to perform' (Hield 2010, p.58). She does concede that individual singers' interpretations of songs are closely guarded but insists that 'there remains a strong impetus to disseminate the canon of folk song to a wider audience, reaching beyond the current participants of the folk scene' (*ibid*). If the phenomenon of 'revival' as driven by objectives based on the maintenance of what are perceived as desirable cultural standards, it is apparent that subscribers to this idea will perceive a sense of duty to protect a set of cultural values, objectified as the 'folk tradition' and seek ways (sometimes with missionary zeal) to stimulate public awareness and national consciousness of that tradition through music events, education, outreach activities, publications and media relations.

For the direct observer of present-day folk and acoustic clubs, the cultural concerns, represented by the revival movement and its protagonists, appear to be at odds with the more eclectic and liberal approach to the repertoires of music performed on the ground – at least in some establishments that promote themselves as 'folk clubs'. The aggressive imposition of policies by some British clubs towards the end of the last century, drawing a sharp distinction between definitions of 'traditional' and 'non-traditional' music, seems to have largely disappeared. Preferences for styles and sub-genres of folk, ranging from Irish

traditional to contemporary guitar-based music, are still apparent in the variety of folk clubs operating today, perhaps through the choice of guest acts or the repertoires of resident performers, but many folk clubs – including all three case study clubs for this research – appear at first sight to work to a different set of priorities than those associated with 'folk revival'. Their focus is the social act of performing rather than the preservation of what is performed.

There is clearly scope for debate on the extent of any perceived impact of the 'folk revival' on the folk club scene. There has undoubtedly been an active movement since the turn of this century to reinvigorate the performance of folk by encouraging young performers to develop 'authentic' arrangements of traditional material, albeit with 'modern' interpretations. This process that has been stimulated in part though outreach work by organisations promoting traditional arts and education, higher education courses such as Folk and Traditional Music Degree at Newcastle University or the study programmes at the Birmingham Conservatoire, encouragement for young performers at folk festivals through showcase competitions, and through the BBC Young Folk Awards for musicians aged 15 to 20.

However, Brocken's characterisation of the folk club movement in the 1980s and 1990s suggests that the revival subculture was destined to remain trapped in a middle-class enclave of self-delusion. He cites the view expressed by Boyes that the revival is 'hidebound by historical theory' (Boyes 1993, p.241), to support his claim that 'while these folk club systems appeared to establish continuity, they also endowed the folk scene with a bulwark against reality' (Brocken 2003, p.114). He also cites Finnegan's characterisation of folk clubs in Milton Keynes as predominately 'middle class' and 'middle-aged' (Finnegan 1989, p.68) and conservatively purist in their approach, resisting the 'opposed camp' of musicians seeking outlets for more experimental forms of folk music, combining it with rock, bluegrass, blues or jazz (p.69). For Brocken, the folk club movement that emerged from the post-war revival transformed it by 'acting out a fantasy of authenticity':

> They remoulded the past into a 'world', because the present could not be moulded to serve
> such desires ... The past was malleable because its inhabitants were no longer around to
> contest the manipulations; thus their 'world' projected a historical totality. These folk

categories of musical totality would need rethinking if turned to contemporary times, but they are able to survive intact in the folk club because they are dealing with an internalised narrative. (Brocken 2003, p.116)

Chapter 1.4: Folk practices and institutions in England

Folk clubs form the focus of this study, because they provide the settings for interactions and relationship-based practices between amateur musicians at a social level. As cultural events, they establish a territory and domain for amateur music-making, in both geographic and temporal terms. They constitute a social environment, projected by their participants but simultaneously assimilated by them such that their own roles and identities are ascribed and acted out through their interactive behaviours and performances. In Chapter 4, I will make a case for interpreting the significance (in the literal sense of being meaningful) of the objects and properties – and indeed the people – that make up the world of the folk club and present the outcomes of this analysis as a basis for understanding the defining features of amateur music discourse. For such an analysis to carry authority, it is important to recognise that the majority of signifying elements, that constitute the totality of a folk club as a social experience and cultural institution, are not specific to clubs of any one geographic or temporal location and, in many cases (and surprisingly) can be relatively fixed and unyielding in their nature, having withstood major cultural changes over the last half-century, in the rapidly developing social world that forms their external environment.

As discussed in Chapter 1.3, it appears to have taken two 'folk revivals' in England to establish folk clubs as institutions which are now regarded as fundamental to the continuing survival of the folk movement. Folk clubs are useful indicators of the state-of-play of the folk scene generally: its well-being, its direction and its notable performers. Furthermore, they form a complex and dynamic network of communication (Smith 1987) between organisers, performers and folk enthusiasts through both formal and informal structures.

Of course, some individual folk clubs are more enduring than others and, as indicated in Chapter 3, there is considerable variation in modes of organisation, repertoire and performance quality. But the folk club movement itself enables participants to engage in similar music-making experiences from Penzance to Penrith and it is therefore productive for this research to examine the factors from within and outside the development of folk music generally that have defined their nature and practices. Clearly, they are not the sole outlet for folk performance and are, some would argue, becoming increasingly less

significant in their influence on the directions and character of the folk scene generally, giving way to folk festivals, arts centre and village hall concerts, 'open mic' pub entertainment, and so on. BritFOLK's guidelines to 'Running a Folk Club', while concentrating on clubs that book regular guest acts, acknowledges the 'relatively new phenomenon' of 'open mic' sessions, described as operating 'much like folk clubs and singarounds, but you will hear less traditional material and usually encounter a younger audience' (folkWISE, 2007). The guidelines do not indicate any specific connection between the reduction in traditional songs and the audience profile but at least highlights an emerging outlet for the performance of acoustic music by amateurs (as the guide helpfully explains, there is often no microphone, in which case the sessions are sometimes called 'unplugged'). A link is also included to guidance on the organisation of house concerts.

Folk clubs are nevertheless a ubiquitous part of modern cultural life. Total numbers of clubs may ebb and flow, partly as a response to changing economic circumstances, but most parts of Britain have at least one or two – or sometimes a network of – local folk clubs within driving distance, operating under very similar sets of rules and principles to facilitate amateur music-making and sharing as an informal social activity.

Folk as cultural institution - the 'folk scene'

In the introduction to this dissertation, I identified the institutional phenomenon of the 'folk scene' as part of the 'external' or contextual discursive framework that impacts on the intersubjective practices of musicians in folk clubs. At this point of establishing terms of reference for this research, it is important to justify the use of the term 'institutional', with its implications of a structured and powerful mechanism for the establishment of a cohesive and normative set of mores. Such a perspective would endow the 'folk scene' with a cohesive identity as a 'socially constructed reality' (Watson 2008, p.58), reflecting values of tradition, preservation and articulation of cultural identities and histories. Taken to its extreme, this could present the 'folk scene' as a culturally recognised phenomenon that fulfils its purpose efficiently and effectively. Such a definition would reflect a Weberian view of rational social action in which rule-governed institutional systems 'depend for their

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efficacy—for their reality, on the fact that they are widely shared, or have been promulgated by individuals or groups that have been granted the right to determine such matters' (Scott 1983, p.14).

A critical and contrasting view would present the 'folk scene' as a more organic and human entity: from an ethnomusicologist's stance, less an institution and more a 'community'. The concept of 'community' forms the basis of Fay Hield's (2010) research although she does identify the use of the term 'scene' in this context as 'contentious' (2010, p.2 footnote) and furthermore acknowledges that 'community' is not a term widely applied by folk singers to their own social groupings (2010, p.1). For the purposes of her research, she treats 'community' as a 'transient concept' and her object of study as 'no longer tied to a geographical location and its inhabitants but rather moves with individuals through their activity within individual self-defined "folk" events to their unique conceptualisation of the "folk scene"' (2010, p.5).

Working within Hield's terms of reference as a participant observer, it is possible to identify considerable evidence to support the notion of the 'folk scene' behaving intrinsically as a community, seeking to sustain and reinforce its own presence and identity in a cultural climate where it has been treated as marginal and specialist. Implicit in many accounts of the position occupied by folk music in English cultural life is a theme of alienation and antipathy, typified by the infamous off-the-cuff statement by former junior culture minister, Kim Howells in 2001 when he described his 'idea of hell' as 'listening to three Somerset folksingers' (BBC 2001). In 2000, Mike Sutton pointed towards a comparative lack of institutional support for English folk music, reflecting and reinforcing its marginalised status:

> Today, English folk music remains a minority interest, often scorned by the cultural establishment. (An attitude summed up by the famous legend that Sir Thomas Beecham advised "try everything once, except incest and folk-dancing" - to which a critic allegedly replied "what's so bad about incest?") English folk music has little exposure on the broadcast media - far less than Irish traditional music gets on RTE, or Scottish traditional music on BBC Scotland. It has no protected place in the school curriculum. Some regional arts agencies, like *Folkworks* in the North-East, are striving to improve the situation, but England still has no national centre of status and influence comparable to the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, or the School of Scottish Studies in Edinburgh. The majority of the

English public ignore or reject 'folk' music of any kind. Even the remainder tend to prefer American, Celtic or 'World' music to their own heritage. The revival appears to have failed - so far. (Sutton 2000)

Since these words were published, it is possible to identify progress in the establishment of the folk genre and the drawing of material from the folk 'tradition' to produce an increasingly popular style of performance and presentation. Key figures and organisations have emerged in addition to the longer-established EFDSS to stimulate interest and action in the promotion of folk music and related activities. *Folkworks*, referred to by Sutton, was established as a development agency in the North East of England in 1988 and one of the founders of The Sage Gateshead music and arts centre, promoting artistic development through a wide range of musical styles (The Sage Gateshead 2013). It also co-operated with Newcastle University to establish a BA honours degree in Folk and Traditional Music in 2002 (Association of Festival Organisers n.d.). The development agency *FolkArts England* was established by folk promoter and organiser of Towersey Folk Festival, Steve Heap in 2004 and received Arts Council funding until 2009 before its work became subsumed into the *Association of Festival Organisers* (Mrs Casey Music n.d.). Arts Council funded groups, such as the *Traditional Arts Team* (West Midlands) and *Yorkshire Folk Arts* (South Yorkshire) have been active in promoting and encouraging traditional folk arts of singing, dancing, and storytelling, each playing a part within their regions to provide identity and direction for a 'folk community' in England, especially since 2000.

However, developments in online communication and the growth of information-sharing forums and social networks have also provided a platform for 'grass roots', community action to stimulate renewed interest and a more receptive attitude to folk music within popular culture while encouraging the folk movement to reaffirm its own identity. Two notable examples of online networks that have contributed to a growing sense of cohesiveness and unity in the folk scene are *BritFOLK* and *Mudcat*. *BritFOLK* became the name of a networking forum for professional folk artists that began as an electronic newsletter published by folksinger and agent, Jacey Bedford. It took on a promotional role, recording and showcasing British folk artists in the United States, a function that was taken up through a limited company, *FolkWISE*, whose board comprised active *BritFOLK*

contributors. *FolkWISE* was officially wound up in 2009 but its board continues to operate as the BritFOLK committee (BritFOLK n.d.).The *Mudcat Café* is a global public discussion forum and database that originated in the United States in 1995 and enables widespread and participation for folk fans, musicians and events organisers. Its database of registered members exceeds 75,000 of whom an estimated 23,000 actively contribute to online forum discussions (Thompson 2009).

More recently, *Folk 21* has emerged as a national support organisation for 'folk clubs and venues in the UK which book guests and present small scale concerts' (Folk 21 n.d.). Proclaiming itself as a platform for 'folk clubs, folk artists and agents working together' (*ibid*), the movement to support and reinvigorate the folk club circuit began with a blog post by John Richards, a professional folk artist who expressed concern that folk clubs were struggling to survive even while the profile of folk music performed in large concerts and festivals appeared to be more prominent (Richards 2011a).

While these and other initiatives may be cited as examples of 'community' action, the case for treating the 'folk scene' as an institution, for the purposes of this research, rests on the contention that such action quickly, and inevitably, produces its own formalised structures and organisational values. Associated with the two 'folk revivals' that underpin historical accounts of British folk music in the 20th century (such as Boyes 1993, Harker 1985, Brocken 2003) are a cast of pivotal individuals and personalities, from Cecil Sharp to Ewan MacColl, whose convictions and authority have been brought to bear on the furtherance and fulfilment of clearly defined objectives, deemed to serve the interests of culture and tradition. These revival movements remain as significant influences on modern folk-related practices and the early folk clubs of the 1960s have provided a foundation for a growing infrastructure of festivals, support and pressure groups, educational and training programmes, specialist media, recording studios and distribution networks, tour management, conferences and award ceremonies, marketing, public relations and a general professionalisation of a folk 'industry'.

English folk clubs - histories and developments

A.L.Lloyd offered a characterisation of folk music based on practice rather than form, which implied a specific view on the circumstances of its performance:

> ...the main thing is that the songs are made and sung by men (*sic*) who are identical with their audience in standing, in occupation, in attitude to life, and in daily experience (Lloyd 1975, p.346)

The statement evokes an essentially communal and non-hierarchical music event where the boundaries between performer and audience may be easily crossed and roles interchanged. The informality of many folk clubs across Britain allows for this type of interrelationship, following a typical format, as characterised by Ruth Finnegan from her observations of folk clubs in the Milton Keynes area:

> Many of those who attended the folk clubs went as receptive and participating audience or provided 'floor' performances from time to time. The clubs also thus rested on a pool of informal local talent in the form of floor singers or instrumentalists and – not least – chorus participants, apparently so readily available in Milton Keynes folk settings. (Finnegan 2007, p.61)

There are probably at least 500 regular and organised events, occurring on a weekly or monthly basis, that could be described as 'folk clubs' or 'sessions' in England although this figure can never be anything other than approximate. Numbers will vary as much as interpretations of what constitutes a 'folk' club and when attempts have been made to quantify them. Brocken (2003) describes the growth of UK folk clubs in the 1970s: 'During the mid-1960s it was estimated by the EFDSS that there were upwards of 300 folk clubs in Britain; by the mid-1970s that figure had quadrupled – a massive power base' (p.114). Some recent estimates are more pessimistic. *Folk 21* suggests 'that there are slightly more than 200 in the UK currently which book guests , weekly, fortnightly, monthly and less frequently' (Richards 2011b). In April 2010, Martin Nail listed 201 clubs in England that include the word 'folk' in their title (Nail 2010). The number increases to 259 when clubs are included that identify themselves as 'acoustic', 'live', 'roots' and 'traditional' music venues. The *Folk and Roots* online guide to folk and acoustic music in the UK lists 715 venues in England, Scotland and Wales including public houses, hotel, restaurants, arts centres and community halls and

hosting events that range from sessions, 'open mic' nights and ceilidhs to learner sessions and workshops (Folk and Roots n.d.). Styles of music referred to in venue titles include folk, acoustic, 'unplugged', indie, blues, bluegrass, Irish, Celtic and Americana music.

Add to that the numerous 'sessions' and 'singers clubs' that do not promote themselves on national listings, or clubs that focus on performance with specific instruments – guitar, fiddle, pipes, etc. – and the total becomes more difficult to determine, not least because many such events are gatherings of friends which have little need to advertise themselves through means other than word of mouth[10].

If the widespread manifestations of folk clubs and their ilk across the United Kingdom is indication of their significance as cultural events, this is further reinforced by the growth and overall popularity of folk festivals since the 1970s. 216 such annual events are listed in the 2013 Spiral Earth festival directory (Spiral Earth 2013), many of which feature internationally recognised 'headline' acts which are also active on the concert hall and arts centre circuits of the United Kingdom.

The few historical accounts that exist of the development of the folk club movement in Britain, such as MacKinnon (1993), Boyes (1993), Brocken (2003) and Pegg (2007), locate their starting point in the 'second folk revival' and, in many cases, as a progression from the 1950s skiffle boom. Georgina Boyes records the establishment of a monthly 'Folk Song Club' for EFDSS members and friends at Cecil Sharp House, London in 1949 – 'and a similar small club was also set up by the English Folk Dance and Song Society in Birmingham' (Boyes 1993, p.206). She also cites contesting claims for where and when the first folk club was formed in

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[10] 'A Survey of Live Music Staged in England & Wales in 2007 presents the findings of research conducted by British Market Research Bureau on behalf of the Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS). The purpose of the survey was 'to measure the provision of live music in venues in England and Wales whose core business is not the staging of live music and to provide insight into the early effects of the Licensing Act 2003 on the staging of live music in these venues' (Hanson *et al* 2007). It offers some insight into the perceived position of folk music as a form of popular entertainment in more intimate public settings. Venues were identified as Public Houses, Hotels & Inns, Small Clubs, Student Unions, Restaurants and Cafés, Members Clubs & Associations, Church & Community Halls. Of the 1577 respondents interviewed, 10% stated that they had staged folk music events in the year prior to the survey. This compared with pop/popular music: 49%; rock: 28%; and disco: 26%. Categories that may be considered generically closer to 'folk' were world music: 5%; Irish: 2%; and blues: 1%. (Hanson *et al* 2007, p.21)

Britain (pp.231-2). A number of circumstantial factors led to the establishment of folk clubs 'with or without the assistance of the English Folk Dance and Song Society' (p.232); these ranged from choir members meeting in a pub and adapting their repertoire to transformations or offshoots of existing jazz or skiffle clubs. Boyes asserts, '(r)elative consensus on the kind of activity that constituted a 'folk club' seems to have been reached in 1957' (*ibid*). A common characteristic of many of the early folk clubs was a membership drawn from the political left and organisations such as the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (Boyes 1993, p.234). Early folk clubs formed to preserve folk traditions were relative few in number, compared with those drawing from the established jazz, blues and skiffle movement and providing platforms for radical musical expression, although one notable exception was Ewan MacColl's Ballad and Blues club, formed in 1953 (MacKinnon 1993, p.25).

Other new clubs of the time reflected a growing interest in American folk music. Many folk clubs and some folk festivals trace their own histories back to the troubadour singer-songwriter of the 1960s, inspired by the music of American folk performers – Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger, Phil Ochs, Bob Dylan and Joan Baez – whose songs expressed the counter-ideologies that challenged America's involvement in Vietnam, spoke up for civil rights and were performed to the crowds that marched in Washington DC with Martin Luther King. One lasting legacy of this influence is the proliferation of the guitar as the most common musical instrument played at folk clubs, although there are notable exceptions. Boyes refers to a club in London in 1959 which barred 'non-trad instruments' and the emergence of 'policy clubs' which 'refused to admit musicians who arrived with guitars' (Boyes 1993, pp.237-8).

Critical accounts of the folk club movement in Britain since the 1950s appear to indicate a transition from the excitement of a radical popular, grass-roots phenomenon to a more conservative network of events, tending to appeal to middle-class audiences, providing refuge from an alienating ideology of popular culture. The 1960s saw a popularisation of folk music as a spontaneous and authentic alternative to the 'mainstream', chart-orientated forms of 'pop' music of the time. However it has remained firmly in the realm of 'alternative' and the network of folk clubs in Britain. MacKinnon suggested in 1993 that

most people's contact with folk music was limited with little encouragement offered for many to attend folk clubs: a scenario which I would contend has changed little in the present-day folk scene:

> … folk is no different from other musical genres in that different perceptions of the music are held by those not involved or interested compared to those of aficionados. This gulf may be wider for folk music, because it has a very low profile in the mass media. Those who do not attend folk scene events are unlikely to come into contact with folk music except for prior contact during its heyday in the early 1960s, from school, or if they happen to be in a town during a folk festival. (MacKinnon 1993, p.33)

A similar picture of folk music is painted in Finnegan's description of folk music in Milton Keynes during the 1980s where it was 'actively practised by only a small and select minority' (Finnegan 2007, p.70). The 'five or six "folk clubs"' in the area (p.58) depended on a small group of local performers although she points out that folk music did achieve a wider audience 'through the established custom of local associations hiring a folk dance band to play for their annual socials' (*ibid*). The performers themselves were nevertheless dedicated to the genre:

> For the active folk performers … the world of folk music was something which gave a deep meaning and value to their view of themselves and their experience: something that they 'spend more time thinking about than their work'; they 'live for folk'. (Finnegan 2007, p.58)

If Finnegan were to survey the current folk club circuit of Coventry and Warwickshire, the location for my case study clubs, she would find it notable how little it has changed since she conducted her fieldwork research nearly thirty years earlier. Many clubs depend on the dedication of their organisers and small group of hardcore supporters plus the patronage of a mobile set of fans, again relatively small in number, who visit a number of different clubs in the area, sometimes weekly but often irregularly, to listen or to perform as floor artists, session musicians or participants in singarounds.

While one may initially seek to define such establishments by the style or genre of music performed – i.e. a 'folk' club is where people perform and listen to 'folk' music – it is clear from a cursory observation of clubs in the British Isles that there is considerable variation in both repertoire and format. Even those clubs that may be considered as 'mainstream' and

more 'professional' in their approach and outlook, for example by working to a formal business model and booking acts which enjoy national and international recognition and popularity[11], have been known to demonstrate a catholic approach to their choices of guest artistes, while many folk festivals unashamedly present a line-up of acts which include performers of rock, jazz, blues, country and other musical styles[12].

MacKinnon's (1993) research of the British folk scene in the early 1990s included visits to over 30 folk clubs across the country. While observing many differences between clubs 'with regard to characteristics of performance repertoire, organisational structure and audience-performer dynamics' (1993, p.38), he was nevertheless able to typify the organisational structure and atmosphere of clubs within a continuum from singers' clubs which never book guest artists, to concert-style events where guest acts are booked on a regular basis:

> The bulk of the folk clubs are those that book guests interspersed with occasional singers' nights. Musically the clubs range from those wedded to the folk traditions of the British Isles to those embracing blues and stylistically contemporary material. They vary in size from small clubs which book cheaper artists and use singers' nights to cross-subsidise guest nights, to large clubs booking nationally known names virtually every week. There is also variation in what I could only describe as 'cosiness'. The cosiest clubs are those which give the appearance of being a group of friends, with much good-natured banter as the floor singers get up to perform, enthusiastic joining in of choruses, an attentive audience and little background chatter. At the other extreme are clubs which are verging towards weekly concerts. There are clubs which are looking outwards and attracting new audiences and others which are more inward-looking and making no special promotional efforts.
>
> (MacKinnon 1993, p.38)

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[11] Clubs that meet this description include The Black Swan Folk Club in York, the Red Lion Folk Club in Birmingham, the Ram Folk Club in Thames Ditton and the Nettlebed Folk Club in South Oxfordshire, all past winners of the BBC Folk Awards category for 'best folk club'.

[12] The English folk-rock band, Fairport Convention has included some unusual choices of act in its annual 'Fairport Cropredy Convention' festival. While the event is specifically not marketed as a 'folk festival', it features artists whose style and repertoire reflect the tastes and expectations of folk music fans but in a programme that also includes decidedly 'non-folk' acts. For example, the 2010 festival included a performance by veteran British rock singer, Steve Winwood while the 2011 event presented a 2-hour show by the British rock and roll band, Status Quo.

Finnegan's earlier experience of folk clubs indicated that the informal and relaxed atmosphere of the events was underpinned by a structure of carefully maintained organisational conventions:

> Starting and finishing times were fairly strictly kept to, there were accepted conventions about introducing and applauding performers, and the organisers tried to stop too much moving around during the performance of a song – in contrast to some other music performances in pubs. (Finnegan 2007, p.59)

She noted how funding was a determining and often limiting factor in the scope of activities and the booking of guest artists at folk clubs. Most clubs derived their sole income from admission charges, raffles and membership fees:

> Most clubs just could not afford high fees. This was probably one reason why they had few professional artists – in the sense, that is, of full-time musicians; for in the other sense of accepted standards many folk performers *were* regarded as 'professional', combining full-time jobs with regular appearances in the clubs. The fees remained low from the performers' viewpoint, but clubs still found it hard to make ends meet and for this reason local guests often agreed to take minimal fees or to perform 'free'. ... The organisers usually found they were 'dipping into their own pockets' for stamps, phone calls, petrol, entertaining guests, providing the tickets or prizes for the raffle...   (Finnegan 2007, p.60)

It is apparent from past observations by Finnegan and MacKinnon and from my own present-day observations that the majority of folk clubs in Britain are run on a volunteer basis by enthusiasts rather than as profitable business enterprises. In spite of the relative wealth of many of their middle-class participants, club finances often tend to vacillate between small profit and loss, relying strongly on a format which includes frequent nights which incur little or no expenses – singers nights, local guest features, etc. – to subsidise the nights which feature the more 'valuable' commodity of a well-known guest act.

Although the folk clubs observed by MacKinnon are not primarily intended to be money-making enterprises, many of them are organised through a relatively formal committee structure:

> Most folk clubs are run by a committee elected by the membership, though a number of clubs are run as 'benevolent' dictatorships. These committees tend to be organised on

standard committee lines, and meet separately from the club night. The Hoy at Anchor folk

club, which is fairly typical, has the following committee roles: chairman, treasurer, bookings

secretary, minutes secretary, newsletter editor, assistant treasurer, and four people doing

publicity... (MacKinnon 1993, p.35)

There is no dearth of guidance available to would-be club organisers, presented from perspectives ranging from the network of folk enthusiasts seeking to promote and expand outlets and audiences for traditional and acoustic music, to professional and semi-professional artists themselves offering advice to clubs on promotion and organisation that may increase audience sizes and enjoyment and, as a consequence, demand and fees for the guest performers. *Folk 21* compiled a practical and reasonably succinct guide in 2011 entitled 'Successful approaches guide to running a folk club/venue with a view to increasing audience numbers' offering 'a collection of suggestions for improving attendance numbers – and consequently the financial health – for clubs that book guest artists' (Alcock *et al*, 2011). Advice is offered under the headings of 'booking policy', 'price policy', 'naming your club', 'your venue', 'on the night' (advice on managing the event itself to enhance audience enjoyment) and 'advertising and promotion'. Other guides readily available include the folksinger Hamish Currie's 'Tips on Starting A Folk Club', (Currie n.d.), updated from advice pages he first published online in 1999, and the comprehensive BritFOLK guide (folkWISE, 2007), which includes practical and legal advice collected from various public web forums such as Mudcat and uk.music.folk. Information here includes constitutional requirements of formal membership clubs, licensing requirements for public houses under current legislation, registration with the Performing Rights Society, health and safety issues such as PAT testing and public liability insurance, disability access, advice on fundraising, booking policy, negotiating fees with artists, contracts and liaising with agents, and promotion and marketing.

Little evidence is available to demonstrate correlation between the extensiveness of organisational structures in place and the profitability of the club although anecdotal evidence suggests that the success and survival of many folk clubs can be attributed to organisational skills and dedication of individuals, whether they work on committees or run clubs on a more *ad hoc* basis. There is also some variety between club policies, whether

formally stated or implicit in practice, on time allocated to floor singers, procedures for booking guests, or determination of admission charges, but again the extent to which a club is overtly policy-driven does not appear to have much bearing on its commercial success, other than ensuring that policies in place do not discourage support and attendance. In Chapter 4.7, I consider how perceptions of value for money and wider contextual issues of political economy may impinge on the experience of what are, on the face of it, essentially *amateur* music-making practices, but at this stage it is important to establish that folk clubs, as institutions which provide the discursive setting for interactions between amateur musicians, usually base their operational practices on a desire to maintain stability rather than to expand or maximise profits. In this way, they represent – at least to all appearances – a particular mode of social experience for musicians and audiences based on informality, interactivity and participation, more in keeping with a philosophy of folk music as shared performance, more in the spirit of A.L.Lloyd's anti-hierarchical definition of folk music. I shall indicate however that there is some degree of idealisation in the aspirations of many folk clubs towards this mode of practice and discuss in Chapter 4.3 how discourses of status differentiation between musicians still permeate this egalitarian environment.

MacKinnon's (1993) characterisation of the British club scene, while somewhat descriptive in nature, provides a strong grounding to my own research, in spite of the 20-year time span between his observations and mine. This is remarkable in itself; once folk clubs had become established as institutionalised cultural phenomena in Britain in the 1960s, they have quickly become entrenched within a recognisable set of formal structures, widely understood by those who take part, with the average age of participants as possibly the only factor of long-term change. The appearance of folk clubs in post-war Britain may have been the outcome of revolutionary cultural change and a reaction against the dynamics of modernism driving the mainstream industries of music production, but many clubs appear quickly to have become ossified, both in terms of routine and, in many cases, repertoire.

<u>Folk and the media – constructions and representations</u>

A particular focus for discussion on the position of folk music in British cultural life is the extent to which it receives coverage in 'mainstream' media. Just prior to completion of this dissertation, the BBC announced that the presenter of its Radio 2 *Folk Show*, Mike Harding was to be replaced, after fifteen years on the programme, by Mark Radcliffe whose 'wider appeal' would reflect that 'folk had changed from a specialist genre to something mainstream and popular' (BBC 2012; see also Plunkett 2012). While occupying a significant and influential position within the UK folk scene, the weekly hour-long programme is contracted to the BBC by the independent Smooth Operations production company. The company works with the BBC to organise and present the *BBC Radio 2 Folk Awards*, an annual event celebrating various categories of acts, albums and achievements. The programme has frequently been the subject of critical discussion on internet folk forums with concerns ranging from the limited amount of time it offers to do justice to the scope and variety of folk artists performing on the folk club and festival circuits, to the programme's perceived tendency 'to cover acts of dubious relevance and/or who receive generous airplay elsewhere in the Radio 2 schedule, whilst ignoring home-grown developments until they have been achieved prominence by other routes' (uk.music.folk 2010).

Ironically – and despite Maconie's eulogy for the genre and culture of folk music (see page 25) – the amount of popular media coverage of folk and roots music in the UK does not appear to reflect any shift from 'specialist' to 'mainstream'. The BBC has recently presented three television programme series dedicated to folk (and similar) music, all of which were broadcast on their specialist digital channel, BBC Four whose audience share was recorded as 0.9% in February 2013 (Broadcasters' Audience Research Board 2013). *Folk Britannia* was part of the channel's 'Britannia' series of music documentaries and comprised three hour-long programmes, transmitted in February 2006, in which notable folk performers related the development of British folk music scene from World War II to the end of the 20th century. The three-part documentary series *Folk America* was first broadcast in January and February 2009, while *Transatlantic Sessions,* featuring live performances by musicians from Ireland, Scotland, the United States and Canada, has run for five 6-part series since its first

broadcast, also in January 2009 (BBC 2013). Highlights of the annual Cambridge Folk Festival, produced by Smooth Operations, have been broadcast on BBC Four (and Sky Arts television) and television coverage of the BBC Radio 2 Folk Awards has been available through the BBC's red button facility since 2011[13]. While all of these programmes represent 'headline' acts on the concert circuit, very few of them offer insight into the events of the smaller folk clubs across the British Isles.

The BBC also presents local and regional radio programmes on folk music (Bedford n.d.) on a similar format to its national programme, featuring new album releases, archive folk tracks, guest interviews and announcements of tours and events. Recent controversial closures of some regional output, such as Mick Peat and Lester Simpson's *Folkwaves* programme, dropped by BBC Radio Derby in 2011, has fuelled a growing choice of internet radio folk music programmes, including Mike Harding's own online broadcasts which started 30th December 2012, four days after his final BBC Radio 2 programme was aired (UK Folk Music, n.d.).

While folk club organisers have a wide choice of other specialist media outlets to advertise themselves in – national publications such as *fRoots* and *Living Tradition*, internet radio stations, online listing services and regional folk websites and magazines – other mainstream media coverage is restricted to specialist columns in national and local newspapers and occasional features and announcements on radio. One explanation for the apparent disparity between the widespread practice of folk music performance and the attention given to it by mainstream media lies in the amateur status of many of the smaller venues. While they may bring in custom to the pubs and clubs which host such events, folk clubs tend not to be run as profit-making concerns and the majority of organisers (including those interviewed for this research) do not expect to derive any personal income, even if the club books and pays for semi-professional guest artists. Some organisers may invest small sums of money into advertising – mainly by printing flyers for distribution at other folk events – but many are not geared up for regular widespread media coverage and tend to

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[13]   This is not intended as an exhaustive list of television coverage of folk music in the UK but an illustration of the content of significant programmes broadcast in recent years.

rely on email, social media, text messages or word-of-mouth announcements to regulars to keep potential audiences informed of their programme of events.

Another point of incongruity between the priorities embedded within the professional discourse of mainstream media and those of greater significance to participants of amateur music events could lie in the purpose of such events and expectations that people may have of them. While print and (especially) broadcast media coverage of music events tends to celebrate the skills and virtuosity of participating artists, amateur club organisers often place as much – if not more – emphasis on the event as a form of community participation, a social gathering where people can sing or play instruments, whatever their level of skill. Under the heading of 'Promotion and Marketing', the BritFOLK guide for club organisers (folkWISE 2007) seeks to bridge this discursive gap by providing practical and functional advice on press release writing with tips on format, the use of quotations, the quality of photographs, and so on, based on the rationale of increasing the likelihood of media coverage by reducing the journalist's workload in preparing the story.

I recently addressed a similar theme at the FM[2] (Folk Monthly) Conference organised by the West Midlands *Traditional Arts Team*, in a presentation designed to explain to promoters of folk music and folk arts the distinction between public relations and advertising and to advise folk club organisers on strategies for effective promotion and media relations. (Traditional Arts Team 2010). Included in the summary notes of subsequent breakout group discussions on marketing and PR were the statements 'Media prejudice with Folk – making folk cool – rebranding', reflecting concern that the popular media project and reinforce a negative image of folk music. This had resulted in discussions among delegates on whether much of the public relations effort should concentrate on rebuilding the image of folk music or whether this compromised the integrity of the genre to force it to fit with popular conceptions. These discussions reflected a longstanding and enduring concern about the position of folk-related practices alongside more 'popular' forms of cultural production.

Michael Brocken reflects on the social and historical implications of the folk revival as a response to the hegemony of popular – and specifically American – culture and attracting an 'important minority' (Brocken 2003, p.15) although he observes that it would be insufficient

to explain the revival simply as a movement to counter the values of industrial capitalism and mass consumption:

> For many Britons mass consumption and media were benevolent, producing greater leisure time, wider musical choice and sustained social advancement. Ironically, both apparent polarities, that is the perception of an experiential lacuna in society and the understanding of mass consumption as a benign influence, can be seen by the historian as being axiomatic of the same context (Brocken 2003, p.15).

One may surmise, at least for the generation of participants who have maintained contact and loyalty with the folk club circuit since the 1960s and 1970s, that a certain 'grass-roots' authenticity is perceived in the experience of visiting a folk club – an antidote and haven from the relentless and glossy hyperreality of popular culture and mainstream entertainment. Thus engagement by the folk scene with the discourses of marketing and media relations may be seen as, at best, a compromise and at worst, irrelevant. In Chapter 5.3, I examine the conceptual tensions between the 'amateur' world of folk clubs and the 'professional' values and expectations inherent in the production and consumption of music as a cultural commodity, but it is useful to conclude this chapter with some reflection on the concept of authenticity as a motivating and defining factor in the experience of sharing music in the amateur setting of a folk club.

Chapter 1.5: Amateur music-making as 'authentic' experience

So far, this chapter has attempted to map out the terms of reference and associated rituals, structures and interactions surrounding the concept of 'folk' as a cultural movement. An exploration of such concepts as folklore, tradition, revival and the 'folk scene', as manifested in the network of folk clubs, festivals and concert tours currently operating in Britain, offers a contingent in which folk may be considered as a set of institutionalised practices. This provides part of the context for exploring interrelationships between musicians and their audiences within the folk club setting but does not offer a complete picture. Underpinning the politics, debates and historical developments that have given shape to the 'folk scene', as it is perceived by its participants and commentators, is a deeper set of values and understandings which are fundamental to folk as discourse. These find expression through the repertoires of musicians and singers, their modes of performance and their motivations to maintain a sense of integrity to the philosophy behind the folk movement. It is undeniable that some amateur performers at folk clubs and sessions are seeking to establish their own professional or semi-professional standing, although very few would seriously regard the English folk club infrastructure in isolation as providing an easy springboard for celebrity status. It is also evident from responses in interviews and online discussions undertaken for this research, that many amateur musicians and audience members frequent folk clubs for reasons primarily associated with socialisation and entertainment. However, it is apparent from the indicators of personal commitment and dedication of many participants within the folk movement that ambitions for career enhancement or the seeking of social gratification are unlikely to offer adequate explanations for people's sense of commitment to the performance and sharing of folk music.

In this section, I explore a proposition that the explanation lies in the integrity of the social experience itself: that people who take part in amateur music-making events find, in such gatherings, a potential for self-actualisation through the ability to participate in the music-making process, not only as musicians seeking to give their best performances but also through listening, learning, singing choruses, jamming, engaging in dialogues, the full gamut of practices that would be encompassed within Small's (1998a) concept of 'musicking'. Woven into this experience are socially shared aesthetic codes which may provide a

rationale for the seemingly personal and ineffable affective moments in which participants feel emotionally 'moved' by the performances or the songs and tunes performed – and indeed by the role that they may play in that performance. It is not uncommon to witness tears in the eyes of audience members as they join in with powerful, harmonious choruses!

It is through this 'genuine' level of experience that people's engagement with music appears to become more profound than the mere act of consumption. The idea that music performance may be considered in some sense authentic, or true to its source or intention, is a recurring preoccupation among musicologists, sociologists and anthropologists. Debates on the definition and application of the term 'authenticity' have occurred frequently in conference rooms and on the peer-reviewed pages of journals since the first so-called folk revival (see for example Karpeles 1949 and Saygun 1951) and the concept continues to preoccupy musicologists and cultural theorists producing research papers, doctoral theses and blogs in the current post-revival era (see for example Stevenson 2004, Hall 2011, Burns 2012). These reveal a variety of perspectives but share a concern that authenticity, perceived by musicians and fans as a desirable quality, is under threat or undermined by a constructed simulation, through commercialism or post-modern eclecticism, or both. As Philip Bohlman observes, authenticity is perceived as an essential and defining quality of folk music, which is thus logically perceived as threatened by the 'unauthentic':

> Ordaining the 'unauthentic' is its otherness: its contrast with the aesthetic ideal of the past and its witness to the challenge of the present. When the presence of the unauthentic exhibits imbalance with the authentic, pieces cease to be folk music, crossing the border into popular music instead. (Bohlman 1988, p.11)

In this way, he draws a distinction between the known provenance of popular music – its composer, its recency, its mass media distribution – and folk music whose genesis is less clear:

> Only the past can prescribe the conditions of contemporary folk music, but the past is beyond our ken. When argued in its most stringent forms, authenticity widens the gap between the past and the present, idealizing the validity of folk music's origins but purposely failing to define them. (*ibid*)

In establishing a context for his analysis of guitar-based indie rock, Matthew Bannister (2006) also regards authenticity as an important factor in the differentiation between pop

music and folk. He refers to Richard Middleton's discussion on authenticity as integral to the 'politics of folk', described as '"real" music, not imposed on or sold to people but produced by them, expressing their participation in an unalienated culture' (Middleton 1990, p.129). Following this argument, Bannister associates 'folk discourse' with 'marginalised social groups and subcultures' whose values are oppositional to those of the commercial mainstream (Bannister 2006, p.27). In his view, the 'folk' aspects of indie music include such authentic indicators as 'locality, "liveness", a DIY, amateur approach, technological dystopianism and understated performance style' (p.28). While his comments are intended to provide insight into indie music as a cultural practice, they reveal an interesting understanding of folk as an authentic musical form through his use of such terms as 'local', 'pure', 'live' and 'amateur'. In the further development of his argument, he characterises folk style as 'primitive' (p.112) and technologically minimalist (p.131), suggesting a view of authentic folk discourse as one which is unmediated by industrial production processes and, in contrast to mainstream pop, closer to its roots within the community.

In a related paper on indie guitar rock (2006b), Bannister links authenticity to 'purity', a defining myth for both punk and folk music suggesting lack of mediation or compromise by market forces. He argues that this exhibits a 'quasi-folk discourse', which paradoxically encompasses 'populism ("music of the people") and anti-populism (an Adorno-esque disdain for mass popular taste)' (Bannister 2006b, p.86).

While views may differ on the meaning of authenticity, there is a widely shared belief that it is in some respect linked to a desire to escape the commercial and market-orientated priorities of the 'mainstream' and to establish a sense of reality and foundation, relating to historical sources and origins, or to generic blueprints of musical forms, or indeed to the experience of witnessing a music performance. Salient positions taken on this concept range from critiques by Harker (1985) and Boyes (1993) of Cecil Sharp's projects to preserve and protect traditional songs and dances in the UK and USA to more recent discussions on whether authenticity is indeed an inherent quality of music performance as a practice specific to defined cultures (Palmer 1992) or a discursive construction generated by music fans, critics and promoters to characterise the experience of music performance.

Pursuing this latter perspective, moments in which an artificial construction of 'authenticity' for some musical genres has occurred are of historical record. Taylor (1997) cites Philip Sweeney's account of how the term 'world music' was agreed on by a group of music promoters in 1987 as a marketing category during a series of meetings in The Empress of Russia public house in North London[14]. Richard A.Peterson claims that the 'authenticity' of country music had developed as a fabricated and commodified concept by the time Hank Williams had become established as a country icon in 1953. He describes a genre, constructed for promotional convenience in a musical environment that was 'in reality' dissipated and complex, but built on a common thread of music-making in rural and small town communities and targeting a clearly defined market:

> In 1923 millions of people in rural areas and towns all across North America sang and played the fiddle and guitar, but 'country music' was not recognized as a form of music distinct from others, and this became obvious when record company executives tried to merchandise the music. They didn't know what music to include and what to exclude, and a number of appellations were applied by the early merchandisers, ranging from 'Old-time, 'Old Time Tunes', 'Old Familiar Tunes' and 'Hearth and Home', to 'Hill and Range', and 'Hillbilly and Western'. They did, however, make the strategic decision to market music by whites and African Americans separately. (Peterson 1997, p.4)

David Grazian's (2003) sociological study of Chicago blues clubs identifies authenticity as a quality promoted to – and actively sought by – fans seeking firm grounding in a world of uncertainties:

> To millions of fans both in America and abroad, the blues symbolizes authenticity in a cultural universe populated by virtual realities, artificial intelligences, and a dizzying sense of placenessness. (2003, p.7)

My interest in authenticity as a guiding concept for the study of amateur music practices partly reflects Grazian's position that the search for such a quality entails an exploration of

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[14]   Editor of fRoots Magazine, Ian Anderson also refers to this moment of 'invention': <http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/2008/jun/15/worldmusic11>. The term 'world music' has since been criticised by journalist, Ian Birrell as constituting a 'ghetto' for non-Western musicians: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/musicblog/2012/mar/22/world-music-outdated-offensive>.

the routines and practices of music clubs and the views and experiences of the people who frequent them, as much as (or more than) the forms and performances of the music itself.

Grazian characterises authenticity of blues music as performed in present-day Chicago in a number of ways. He considers perceptions of its 'truth' to the original experiences of black people in the southern states and whether that experience translates to the urban experience of the contemporary Mid-West (Grazian 2003, p.14). He discusses the inherent qualities of the music itself, its style and how it is performed (p.16). He reflects on commodified authenticity and the appeal of music clubs to tourists seeking an 'authentic' experience through direct exposure to blues performances in Chicago (pp.12-3, 20-1). And he offers insights into the community that is constituted by the club of musicians, bar staff, regulars – their routines, priorities, bonds, shared views and identities (pp.87-124).

This latter point demonstrates how a sociologist can use authenticity as a catalyst for the analysis of a music-orientated community. It provides a coherent theme that, for Grazian, enables the characterisation of the blues club as a world-in-itself, a case study. It also provides opportunities to consider broader sociological concerns, such as gender, race, community and identity.

Grazian adopts an ethnological approach in recording and describing behaviours and statements of protagonists in a series of observed events or dramas. These offer detailed insights into people's expectations of blues clubs as an authentic experience, perceived to a large extent through Erving Goffman's dramaturgical framework (Goffman 1959, cited in Grazian 2003, p.11), which I discuss further in Chapter 2 (on pages 83-87). However, Grazian concludes pessimistically that 'the search for authenticity is always a failing prospect' (Grazian 2003, p.11) as the concept is an artificial construction, based on the assumption of a cultural world that is 'homogenous and unchanging, rather than complex and contradictory' (*ibid*).

Grazian's argument here suggests that the idea of authenticity, whilst providing meaning as a point of reference within the discourse of live music performance, may be regarded ultimately as illusory, or at least mythical in its reassurance for fans and performers of

certain types of music that what they enjoy is in some sense 'genuine' – as is the experience of its performance. Hence a 'search for authenticity' is a search for an escape from artificiality and, paradoxically, a 'promise' of authenticity may be built into music-orientated discourse, at least when associated with blues (or folk) music as a 'professional' or promotional practice.

While Grazian's work provides a colourful and detailed characterisation of venues and viewpoints, the concern of artificiality suggests that a dramaturgical study in itself inevitably places a glass ceiling on the value of the concept of authenticity. It is true that *Blue Chicago* offers more than an attempt to locate authenticity in musical forms or elements of composition, but as such forms are vulnerable to replication by technology, this could be regarded ultimately as a pointless exercise without recourse to an understanding of a current cultural climate in which music performance can be excommunicated from its source, cloned, digitally enhanced or amended, or appropriated for commercial or ideological use. Furthermore, I would contend that the application of sociological frameworks to analyse the social structures and routines of music performance, and the behaviours of performers and audiences, is insufficient to determine the nature and significance of authenticity if they are seeking to define it as a touchstone of music appreciation.

Such methodological limitations could be circumvented by a focus on the *discourses* that surround music-making, where the content of musical compositions and their deconstructions by audiences is secondary to the terms of reference shared by those who are brought together by the *practices* of music performance. Christopher Small's 'musicking' terminology (1998a, 1998b) neatly marks out his position and starting point that music can never be understood in isolation from its social context and that its communicative and experiential power rests within that context. Our engagement with music within a traditional mass society, for example, may encourage us to view 'great' music as testament to the genius of its composers or performers (1998a, pp.33-4), while a more global perspective on 'world' music may focus more on its indigenous qualities. Such views, according to Small, are themselves social constructions which become clearer as we shift

our focus from musical forms and performances to the social practices that surround these forms and practices (1998a, p.8).

Consideration of social contexts and practices that surround music-making opens up new possibilities in the search for 'authentic' musical experiences. It enables us to consider the validity of such experiences, not only as moments of shared consumption and reaction, being part of the 'performance' as a social event, but also how such moments construct or reinforce identity through the (re)affirmation of friendship bonds, shared tastes, shared cultural terms of reference and, in the study of amateur music, the possibility of rejecting 'mainstream' musical values. These considerations in turn open up an understanding of the discourse(s) of amateur music, manifested through shared practice, communal participation and interaction focused on the performance of, and engagement with music.

Awareness of the discursive frameworks and practices of amateur music opens up questions not only about the music itself and its performance but also, and perhaps more significantly, on what happens 'in between' the songs and tunes. If 'amateur' music, performed in places like folk clubs or music sessions, provides an alternative experience to that of commercial or 'mainstream' music consumption, does this in some way suggest that the experience itself is more 'authentic'? What does that mean?

The possibility that authenticity as a concept is a necessary discursive thread to the experience of music performance and reception is raised by Allan Moore (2002), who argues that it is possible to separate out three modes of authenticity focusing respectively on the performer, the audience and the (absent) other, whose situation and experiences constitute a truthful insight for the performer and audience of musical compositions.

The mode which he identifies as 'first person authenticity' (Moore 2002, pp.211-4) reflects Taylor's (1997) distinction of *authenticity as primality'* in which the essence of traditional (folk) music is traced back to a source, historic or the author/performer himself, as an honest expression of experience. Hence vernacular music is authentic when it is not compromised by commercial considerations, but

'… arises when an originator (composer, performer) succeeds in conveying the impression that his/her utterance is one of integrity, that it represents an attempt to communicate in an unmediated form with an audience.' (Moore 2002, p.214)

Moore then skips to 'third person authenticity' (pp.214-8), which moves away from the composition towards its 'execution', whereby the performer 'succeeds in conveying the impression of accurately representing the ideas of another, embedded within a tradition of performance' (p.218). This enables the audience to perceive their experience of the performance to be meaningful and culturally (or personally) relevant, either through shared empathy with the original source via the agency of the performer whose skills and interpretation authenticate that experience, or through veneration of the performer's ability to express or articulate the message or emotion of the piece, e.g. through use of the commonly accepted instrument, such as the guitar. One notable example of this approach to the performance of folk music is the work of the 'Critics Group', led by Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger in the 1960s and seeking to establish an orthodoxy in how folk songs 'should' be performed. (The group is discussed further on page 147.)

Finally, Moore addresses 'second person authenticity' (2002, pp.218-20) as:

'*authenticity of experience*, which occurs when a performance succeeds in conveying the impression to a listener that the listener's experience of life is being validated, that the music is 'telling it like it is' for them (p.220).

In this sense, he argues that music provides a basis for cultural identity, a sense of belonging or 'centredness'; it may be enjoyed as peripheral, non-commercial or in any sense more than 'mere entertainment'. Moore elaborates on the notion of 'centredness' as a concept which:

implies an active lifting of oneself from an unstable experiential ground and depositing oneself within an experience to be trusted, an experience which centres the listener (p.219).

It is through this focus on experience and identity – shared by participants at a music-making event – that Grazian appears to base his search for authenticity in blues clubs. At a simplistic level, one may regard the practice of sharing music as creating an experience that may be defined in these terms as 'authentic': one which enables a group of people, in a

social situation of music-making, to 'escape' from the complexities of life outside that situation and subjectively (intersubjectively) experience a validated identity. From my own perspective, observations of amateur musicians and their audiences at folk clubs – and my interactions with them – would suggest that *authenticity as 'experienced'* and *intersubjectivity* are intrinsically linked concepts which together offer a valuable insight into the essence of amateur music-making discourse. By treating the 'musicking' event as a social and cultural space constructed primarily through the *practice* of sharing music, it should be possible to develop a critical understanding of amateur music discourse by considering how participants effectively (and affectively) act out identities associated with such practice and its authentification of experience.

Moore concludes that first-, third- and second-person authenticity are analytical concepts which in practice overlap and he acknowledges the argument that authenticity may have less relevance for popular music today, citing Born and Hesmondhalgh in the view that authenticity 'has been consigned to the intellectual dust-heap' (Born and Hesmondhalgh 2000, p.30) by a postmodern world in which the 'originary force' of music loses significance once that music has been appropriated for present-day consumption (Moore 2002, p.210). Nevertheless, through the application of Moore's tri-partite model to the practices of amateur music-making in folk clubs, it is possible to recognise authenticity as an important thread in the discursive terms of reference for at least some of the practitioners. In his terms, it is 'ascribed to, rather than inscribed in, a performance' (p.220) and this allows for the possibility that:

> every music, and every example, can conceivably be found authentic by a particular group of
> perceivers and that it is the *success* with which a particular performance conveys its
> impression that counts, a success which depends in some part on the explicitly musical
> decisions performers make. (p.220)

The question remains however whether the concept of authenticity – if it is central to the discourse of amateur music – should be equally ascribed to the performer, the composition or the experience of the audience. Even if authenticity is, as Grazian has stated, ultimately a myth or illusion, its symbolic potency as a constituent element of that discourse needs to be understood if we are able to comprehend in greater detail the cultural character and

significance of amateur music-making practices. In his consideration of whether authenticity should be seen as 'truth' or as an irrelevance in post-modern society, Moore's final point suggests that its significance within the discursive experience of amateur musicians offers a viable third option in this debate. He recognises that his analysis has inadvertently pointed towards the 'construction of subjectivity' (p.220) as an explanation of the role of authenticity within music discourse and asserts his belief that:

> Academic consideration of authenticity should … shift from consideration of the intention of various originators towards the activities of various perceivers, and should focus on the reasons they might have for finding, or failing to find, a particular performance authentic (p.221).

This brings us to the methodological basis of my thesis that intersubjectivity is key to understanding music-making in folk clubs as discursive practice. The perception of authenticity in participants' experience of such practice and in such an environment rests, in my contention, on shared readings and interpretations of the objects which make up that environment and which, in turn, specify and reaffirm the identities that frame subjective experience. In Chapter 2, I discuss the approach adopted in this research to observe and record the statements and actions of participants and the analytical perspective from which they are interpreted.

Chapter 2 – Researching amateur music as social practice

Chapter 2.1: Sources of regulation in music-making

My initial interest when embarking on this research was to explore folk and traditional music as a regulated cultural practice within the folk club environment. Drawing on one of Michel Foucault's definitions of discourse as 'a regulated practice that accounts for a number of statements' (Foucault 1972, p.80), this focus suggests that a critical discourse analysis may reveal evidence of 'cultural control' of music-making within the 'amateur' network of folk clubs, evidence that would be manifested through regulatory frameworks, some explicit and some internalised by the participants and performers. I postulated that the source of this control could be identified in three such frameworks: that of 'professional' standards in performance and practice embedded within the music industry as a commercial enterprise; the more overt administrative and bureaucratic framework of regulation, licensing and funding of music events; and the framework of mainstream popular culture within which the objects and practices of 'folk' culture take on a commodified form.

It is not the purpose of this work however to pinpoint sources of control as determining factors in amateur music discourse. While it is possible to apply a form of analysis not dissimilar from Fairclough's (1995) tripartite formula of text, discourse practice and sociocultural practice, as a means of assessing and characterising the impact of these discursive frameworks, this would not provide a comprehensive picture of what happens when amateur musicians gather and perform, especially when that event is viewed from Christopher Small's 'musicking' perspective. My contention is that *the event should also be seen from the inside looking out*. That is to say, if we consider the night out at a folk club not only in terms of the music performed but also the roles and rules adopted by participants, their modes of interaction, the identities that they take on and project, their organisation of space and format – we are able to identify its intrinsic discursive qualities and how these manifest themselves as practice. We are also able to identify how participants of this

discursive 'musicking' event intersubjectively construct and reaffirm their own sets of meaning, their own values and their own identities. And, by understanding this framework of significance, we are able to identify how they engage with and negotiate those externally-sourced discursive influences.

While those contextual frameworks of professionalism, administration and commodification may be perceived heuristically as regulating and controlling, my argument is that they should not be regarded simply as autonomous and 'external' sources of ideological authority. By treating the discursive events of amateur music-making as 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak' (Foucault 1972, p.49), it is apparent that a determination of the locus of meaning within such events – their self-definition – lies in the social practices of their participants, the sense of identity that participants derive from these practices and the ideological contexts in which they occur. By treating the 'texts' or 'objects of study' for this research, not as objectified and historically located outputs, recorded and archived for structural analysis, but as a dynamic system of 'appropriate' performances (musical and social) and interactions, it is possible to conceptualise a more fluid framework of intersecting (sometimes competing, sometimes complementing) discourses that constitute a cultural environment of ideas and values, not just regulating but giving shape to the nature of such 'performances'. Thus, focus on 'text' as cultural *performance* suggests that productive analysis may be achieved through a dramaturgical model of social action, associated mostly with Goffman (1959), drawing from an extensive body of research into symbolic interactionism inspired by Mead (1934) and formulated by Blumer (1969).

The questions addressed by this research are social rather than musicological. The performance and consumption of music are the primary motivating forces behind the social interactions under scrutiny and consideration of music as a social and cultural practice is a significant component in the interpretation of the observations that have been undertaken for this study. Engagement with – and participation in – music by cultural group members can provide a starting point for a number of scholarly concerns which relate musical text and performance to cultural identity, histories and contexts. Later in this chapter, I shall discuss how the discipline of ethnomusicology offers an enticing framework for the analysis of social

gatherings of music fans. However the central concern for this work is a set of social practices motivated by the enjoyment of music and is not intended to present such practices as defining characteristics of any specific form of musical text.

The focus of this research on social and cultural action does not ignore the influence of musical text on performance and participation but treats it as an importance context for intersubjective practice. The lyrics of folk songs, their messages and the (hi)stories behind them may articulate what Simon Frith describes as 'authentic fantasies' that spring 'from the people themselves' (Frith 1988, p.112), as opposed to the more overtly ideologically-laden 'bourgeois fantasies' of products of the popular music industry. However, folk music's claims of authenticity through realism are, as Frith points out, not immune from discursive and ideological work:

> ...authenticity lies in a particular use of language, a particular treatment of narrative and imagery, a particular ideological position. The problem, then, is not whether folk songs *did* reflect real social conditions, but why some such reflections are taken by collectors to be authentic, some not. Whose ideology is reflected in such definition of folk 'realism'? (Frith 1988, p.113).

Modern performances and sharing of traditional songs, or contemporary songs written in a 'traditional' idiom, are thus part of the intersubjective dynamic of 'musicking'; they interpellate their subjects – folk fans and musicians – and constitute the unique experiential fabric of the folk club as an event, and as meaningful discourse.

Similarly, many of the conventions which underpin social practices by amateur musicians and the relationships between them during musical performances are based on their mutual understandings of musical forms and genres: the AB structure of traditional Irish jigs and reels, the 'three-chord trick' of 12-bar blues, and so on (see, for example, Grazian 2003, pp.105-7 on blues jam sessions). There is considerable variance in the degree of knowledge held by amateur musicians on the codes, conventions and structures of different musical forms; some are seasoned and experienced performers, others are still learning. Similarly, as I have already established in Chapter 1.1, there is a wide range of musical styles performed by amateur musicians, even within folk clubs which are often tolerant of eclecticism in

performances, giving credit instead to the social act of performance and the willingness of participants to share their music within the group.

Not all participants of amateur music events are themselves musicians and preliminary observation of people at folk clubs will indicate that an understanding of amateur music communities is best achieved through emphasis on their interactions as socially motivated practices rather than rituals associated with musical forms or structures. Such an approach distinguishes this study from ethnomusicological concerns of music as a form of social or ritualistic expression but concentrates instead on communities which define themselves through their shared interest in the performance of music as a social routine.

The last thirty years have witnessed considerable interest in music as popular culture and cultural practice, through work that has marked a shift from the purely anthropological concerns of ethnomusicologists and their studies of music-making by specific cultures. Increasing scholarly interest in popular music itself, as a product of cultural production, has opened up a wealth of research which, as Hesmondhalgh and Negus point out, has been concerned 'with questions about the relationships between musical meaning, social power and cultural value' (Hesmondhalgh and Negus 2002, p.2). In more recent years, there has been a growing momentum of interest in the role of music within cultural practice and discourse, concerned less with ideological readings embedded within music as a *text* and more with the meanings derived from music-making as *practice*. My study of amateur music-making in folk clubs reflects this emerging paradigm by treating social interactions that occur at such events as discursive texts in themselves, reflecting repertoires, modes of organisation, hierarchies and meaning systems, and reinforcing a sense of identity for the participants through the processes of intersubjectivity.

This chapter sets out a description and justification of research methods employed in this study, in both epistemological and functional terms. In other words, I shall consider whether they are credible and whether they work. To address the first question, I shall discuss and rationalise the theoretical framework that underpins the analysis undertaken for this research, a framework which combines approaches drawn from American (in particular, Chicago School) sociology (Lutters and Ackerman 1966) and European cultural studies

drawing from Foucault's (1972) conception of discourse and Bourdieu's reflexive sociology (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992).

The process of observing interactions between participants at amateur music-making events highlights some methodological issues surrounding ethnography, its applications within social science and cultural studies and, in particular, the role of the researcher and the interpretation of findings. For this research, my long-term experience and participation in music-making communities, especially folk clubs, clearly opens up possibilities of unique insights but, at the same time, risks of limited objectivity. This warrants consideration of ethnography as a means of recording 'real world' observations but from a positioned perspective.

It is important to establish not only a plausible rationale for the application of ethnographic research activity but also the ways in which its outcomes are treated. Interpretation in this study is couched within terms of reference provided by symbolic interactionism, in which outwardly observable behaviour is treated as meaningful displays or social performances by participants, acted out to meet the expectations of their fellow protagonists in the shared social situation of amateur music events. The insights gleaned from this process provide the means of characterising amateur music practices as discourse. Viewed from this perspective, it is possible to build up a more refined understanding of amateur music-making, not just as a social phenomenon but as a form of cultural expression in which participants establish and reaffirm their identities through the sharing of cultural knowledge and aesthetic codes.

Chapter 2.2 presents a consideration of issues arising from the application of research methods, associated with ethnography and ethnomusicology, to the study of amateur music-making. This is followed by an exploration of the theoretical frameworks of discourse and symbolic interactionism as interpretative frameworks within which the social and cultural practices of amateur musicians at events such as folk clubs may be characterised and understood. Chapter 2.3 focuses on the research activity that has been undertaken to select and gather the raw material of observation and explores questions on the possible impact of the methods applied on the authority of interpretations and findings.

2.2: The theoretical framework

Ethnography

To gain insight into the experience and practice of amateur musicians making music together in a social situation, it is self-evidently productive to observe, record and interpret their actions, interactions, statements and routines within that situation. Hence this research is built on the methodological foundation of ethnography. However for interpretation to carry more authority than speculation, a mode of understanding is required involving an epistemological basis for attaching meaning to the phenomena observed. While the practicalities of conducting an ethnographic study – in this case incorporating participant observation – are considered in this chapter, it is important to establish a rationale for this approach and an evaluation of the credibility of its outcome.

Sara Cohen argues for a perspective which offers insights into the social practices associated with music-making, to complement studies of the structures, histories and political economies behind the cultural production of music:

> … particular emphases within popular music studies (e.g. upon music as commodity, media, capital and technology), and a reliance upon theoretical models abstracted from empirical data, and upon statistical, textual and journalistic sources, needs to be balanced by a more ethnographic approach. Ideally, that approach should focus upon social relationships, emphasising music as social practice and process. (Cohen 1993, p.123)

She comments on the various ways in which ethnography has been applied within cultural studies beyond its initial anthropological purpose of studying cultures and describes an 'ideal' approach to ethnographic research:

> ... a lengthy period of intimate study and residence with a particular group of people, knowledge of the spoken language, and the employment of a wide range of observational techniques, including prolonged face-to-face contacts with members of the local group, direct participation in some of that group's activities, and a greater emphasis on intensive work with informants than on the use of documentary and survey data. Basic to the conduct of research, therefore, is the development of relationships 'in the field'. (Cohen 1993, p.124)

She is describing a traditional view of ethnography which entails direct contact over a long period of time: concentrated research activity that involves full immersion within the field of study. Roy Shuker (2002) makes a similar point in his discussion on how ethnography may be applied to the study of music but points towards a recent tendency to more 'snapshot' approaches:

> There is considerable debate over the status of ethnography as a form of knowledge, and the various approaches to 'field work'. In the traditional and anthropological sense, ethnography involves extensive and intimate involvement in the community studies, but much contemporary ethnography is limited to forms of participant observation ... (Shuker 2002, p.113)

He develops this critique by referring to Cohen's argument for studies of popular music to incorporate closer examination of the world of music-making, with particular emphasis needed on – as Cohen describes them – 'the countless, as yet unknown bands struggling for success at a local level' (Cohen 1993, p.6). The advantage, or at least the potential, of ethnography is its ability to provide, in words, a detailed characterisation of music-making practices in specific communities, drawn from close observation and a sense of involvement by the researcher in the subject-matter through immersion into the culture. In her study of Liverpool rock bands, Cohen (1991) sought to address the concentration of academic studies on popular music's history as a form of cultural production by shifting the focus to 'ethnographic data and microsociological detail' (Cohen 1991, p.6).

Tim Wall (2003) sets out an argument on the value of ethnography in the study of music and culture, suggesting it can address the problems of abstract theory which, on its own, is too open to interpretation to reaffirm the prejudgements of the researcher, and of survey work which cannot generate enough data to be regarded as significant:

> What is needed is an approach that adds to the insights of abstract theory and empirical surveys by providing an attempt to understand the fine details of listening in the cultural terms of the listeners themselves. Such an approach is usually associated with ethnographic analysis... (Wall 2003, p.182)

Through participant observation and interviews, ethnography's capacity to produce 'thick descriptions' of culture (Geertz 1993) can provide insights into music-making as cultural practices, but Wall also sounds a note of caution:

> ...it is still not entirely free of the possibility of prejudgement. It is easy for us to make interpretations solely from our own position, rather than attempt to understand the cultural meanings given to activities by the participants. It is not that our own position is unimportant, rather we need to recognise that it is just that: a position; and one of no more importance for understanding than that of the participants involved in the cultural practices we are seeking to comprehend. (Wall 2003, pp.183-4)

The uses (or abuses) of ethnography as a reliable and scholarly form of analysis have given rise to concern in some quarters. For example, in her reflections on the study of television audiences, Ellen Seiter (2004) expresses reservation about the range of research activities that are referred to as ethnographic:

> Very few media audience studies, even those using ethnographic or qualitative methods, have measured up to the normative standards of ethnography proper. Most of the time 'ethnographic' has been used very loosely to indicate any research that uses qualitative interview techniques. (Seiter 2004, p.462)

In an earlier discussion on television audience research, she criticises the narrowing down of ethnography that has become apparent in some aspects of media studies:

> While ethnographies are based on long-term and in-depth field work, most audience research has been based on brief periods of contact, in some cases less than one hour, with the informants. Also, while ethnographic methods have traditionally been used to study culture as a whole, media researchers study only one aspect of a culture – such as television – when using this method, and attempt to relate it to social identity. (Seiter *et al* 1989, p.227)

We can deduce so far that the appeal of ethnography, as a means of getting close to specific instances of cultural practices, is counter-balanced by concerns that the resulting descriptions may be inconclusive or, indeed, purely anecdotal. An empiricist foundation in a methodology concerned with the observation of real-world phenomena does not protect the use of ethnographic methods in cultural studies from challenges to the validity of their findings. Through its concentration on 'territorially bounded and relatively homogenous

cultural groups' (Mikula 2008, p.65), ethnography is essentially a form of case study analysis, giving rise to questions on the selection and typicality of the case studies themselves, the impact of the researcher's presence and the modes of interpretation and conceptual organisation of findings. Atkinson and Hammersley (1994) point to divisions in viewpoints of ethnography by social scientists:

> For some it refers to a philosophical paradigm to which one makes a total commitment, for others it designates a method that one uses as and when appropriate. And, of course, there are positions between these extremes. (Atkinson and Hammersley 1994, p.248)

They attempt to pin down common features in all approaches to ethnography: emphasis on the nature of social phenomena rather than testing hypotheses, working with 'unstructured', uncoded data, focusing on a small number of case studies, and using description to interpret meanings of human action (p.248). This indicates the potential of ethnography, in epistemological terms, of providing a key to open up insights into social and cultural practices which may be denied or inhibited by research activities based on pre-judgements or categorisations. However, Atkinson and Hammersley warn that the elevation of ethnography 'to the status of a quasi-paradigm in its own right' (p.257) is problematic in view of the diverse ways in which it has been applied in social sciences and the lack of 'a single philosophical or theoretical orientation that can lay unique claim' to its rationale (p.257). They trace its range of applications from its historical basis in anthropology, citing, in particular, Bronislaw Malinowski's (1922) fieldwork of social life in the Trobriand Islands, to their identification of postmodern ethnography and its capacity to 'evoke', rather than 'represent' the social world (Atkinson and Hammersley 1994, pp.249 and 256).

As I discuss in Chapter 2.3 (on pages 94-7), case studies play an illustrative role in this research and also provide a catalyst for interpretation of social interaction and specific cultural practices. However, I would not seek to define this as a 'fieldwork' study, along the lines of Fay Hield's (2010) analysis of folk club meetings, and have consciously avoided the use of intrusive methods of observation and recording at such events. I shall argue instead for the validity of 'findings' gleaned to a significant extent from regular participation and informed personal experience, presented as a more literary and descriptive account of a 'typical' instance of amateur music-making. This interpretative account is supported by

responses that have been given by participants of amateur music events to survey questions and detailed interviews – responses which have undergone the rigours of being recorded and thematically organised as research findings. Nevertheless, I shall contend that an approach that employs such devices as depictive characterisation and literary portrayal of amateur music-making practices circumvents the methodological difficulty arising from the supposition that a single event, observed by a fieldworker, may be treated as representative of a totality of events. The ethnographic basis of this research is my own immersion, not only as a scholar, but as a musician and participant, in the 'real-world' domain that I am exploring, or – applying Bourdieu's (1990) terminology – the 'field'. The veracity that I am claiming for my account of this domain, its structures, its practices, its discourses, rests on the act of interpretation gleaned from long-term experience, rather than the scientific ritual of isolation and 'objective' observation of one-off events. In that sense, my approach as an ethnographer could be regarded as closer to 'evocation' than 'representation' as a way of establishing the 'reality' of amateur music-making. The rationale for this approach can again be found in Bourdieu's sociological method and its basis in 'reflexivity' (Bourdieu 1990, Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992).

I discuss the practical implications of this approach and some of its qualifications in Chapter 2.3 but at this stage it is worth exploring further some of the implications of ethnography as an interpretative research practice. A central theme to Atkinson and Hammersley's historical narrative of the applications of ethnographic research is the perceived dichotomy of the positivist and interpretivist paradigms. While suggesting that this masks the 'diversity of ideas about the character of human social life' (Atkinson and Hammersley 1994, p.250), they nevertheless use this as a framework for characterising the philosophical debates surrounding ethnography; they draw attention to its application as a 'scientific' method of first-hand observation and collection of data by anthropologists, and contrast this with the pragmatic approach of Chicago sociologists, founded on the ideas of William James, John Dewey and George Herbert Mead, seeking synthesis between scientific and hermeneutic analysis within sociology (p.251). Atkinson and Hammersley do acknowledge claims by sociologists of an affinity between participant observation as an anthropological research method (again, I discuss this in greater detail in Chapter 2.3) and symbolic interactionism as a framework for interpretation (p.257), but are critical of what they regard as

inconsistencies in the Chicago School's application of ethnography and its predication on symbolic interactionism which they appear to dismiss as 'largely a subsequent codification of presuppositions' (p.257).

Notwithstanding the argument that methodological flaws and contradictions may exist in the work by Chicago (and other) sociologists who subscribe to symbolic interactionism, I would contend that the concept has considerable appeal for the ethnographer of music-making practices through its capacity to interpret such practices as reflecting and reinforcing a framework of shared meanings. The whole point of ethnography is to gain understanding through close observation of the daily life of a social or cultural group and it is precisely through the researcher's engagement with the group under scrutiny that he or she is able to map out this framework of significance by viewing social practices through the eyes of group members. This takes us beyond a 'codification of presuppositions' to something closer to a voyage of discovery in which the researcher draws up the map whilst (and not before) exploring the terrain. This is a particularly valuable exercise when music-making is central to the practices and identity of the group. An anthropologist may regard the modes of music *performance* as objective characteristics of a defined cultural group, but without engagement with the meanings that the performance evokes for members of that group – how it reflects, for example, their aesthetic perceptions or their sense of identity – such observations are mere descriptions dressed in speculation. My argument – and what I hope to demonstrate in this work – is that symbolic interactionism, and its emphasis on intersubjectivity, makes possible this deeper level of engagement.

Ethnomusicology

The body of scholarly work associated with ethnomusicology demonstrates the benefits of a methodological approach that seeks to uncover the depth and texture of music-making as a cultural experience. There are many examples. John Baily's (2007) celebration of Paul Oliver's lifetime work on blues music, whilst acknowledging that Oliver has never referred to himself as an ethnomusicologist, highlights an approach to research which calls for close engagement rather than distanced, 'objective' observation. He cites the notes on the LP

record accompanying Paul Oliver's book *Blues Fell This Morning* (1960): 'A social study alone cannot explain the blues: one has to try to enter the Negro's world and explore the background of his themes in order to understand the singer'. Baily describes this statement as:

> very much in the spirit of ethnomusicological inquiry, with its emphasis on exploring the 'folk view', discovering the people's own understanding of their culture, trying to 'grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, to realise *his* vision of *his* world', as the founder of social anthropology Malinowski put it (Baily 2007, p.17 citing Malinowski 1922, p.25).

Jonathan Stock precedes his discussion on the relevance of ethnomusicology to the study of British folk music with his summary of what this methodological approach has entailed:

> Instead of gathering recordings alone, the ethnomusicological researcher gathered experience, both in the form of contextual explanation (based on observation and on informants' own readings of what was going on) and in the form of personal know-how, gained from actually learning to perform the music s/he was studying. In other words, the researcher has the responsibility of living among the researched; living as far as possible as one of the researched; taking full part in their musical lives; and gradually coming to understand, typically through personal engagement in performance, what music really means in that particular society. (Stock 1999)

His article then compares the work of the ethnomusicologist with that of the folk music researcher, identifying several areas of contrast, not least the former's interest in the people performing the music – their histories and cultural contexts – compared with his or her impressions on the latter's focus on the music itself, its sources, traditions and movements.

Ruth Finnegan's ethnographic study of amateur music-making in Milton Keynes, England demonstrates how researcher engagement with music-based communities is capable of producing a richer descriptive account of their cultural practices. The musicians that she observes perform in a range of genres: folk, classical, jazz, rock or pop music, brass bands, musical theatre, and country and western. She refers to these as 'musical worlds' (Finnegan 2007, p.31), drawing the term from participants' own accounts and from anthropologists' concentration on distinctive 'worlds' or cultural groups as objects of study. Finnegan links

these to Howard Becker's concept of 'art worlds' (Becker 1982), groups of people who share a collective view of the value of what they produce, generate mutual support and, through their distinctive identity, provide validation of their output as art. On a similar basis, Finnegan treats each 'music world' as 'valid in itself, presented at least in part from the viewpoint of its participants' and describes this approach as 'necessary for understanding the conventions in these differing worlds in their own terms' (Finnegan 2007, p.32). In the process of observation and interaction with these various groups of musicians, Finnegan replaces the term 'worlds' with 'musical pathways' to take into account that they do not constitute exclusive domains but, as Cohen summarises, 'a series of known and regular routes that people choose to keep open, maintain, and extend through their activity, hard work and commitment' (Cohen 1993, p.128).

The search for discourse(s)

In keeping with Christopher Small's (1987, 1998a) formulations around 'musicking', a central concept to my thesis is the nature of discourse arising from the performance and enjoyment of amateur music, primarily as a social event and a socialising practice. A consideration of music-making as part of a cultural event or social ritual reminds us that the performance and sharing of music may indeed be understood as constituting discursive practice. Bruce Horner considers the possibilities of viewing music in this way in his critique of the reification of music as artistic expression that defies scholarly analysis:

> ...invoking the possibility of music speaking '*for itself*' slips right back to the idea of music as separate from discourse, an idea which...is itself a discursive construct. In other words, the attempt to escape the effects of discourse on music simply substitutes a different discourse about music: in place of the commercial bin categories, it names music as 'transcendent,' or as 'ineffable,' or a 'mystery.' (Horner 1999, p.24)

If, in the analysis of music-making events and practices, the social aspect of music-making takes precedence over artistic or aesthetic considerations of the music itself, this research is capable of revealing insights into the role of amateur music as a socialising agent and cultural medium. Observation and interpretation of events, in which music is performed and

shared by 'amateurs' in formalised and semi-formalised social settings, provides an opportunity for the researcher to infer the existence of a framework of values, meanings and modes of appropriate behaviour, shared and understood by members of that social group. Indicators of such a framework lie not only in the musical performances themselves but also in the associated activities and interactions that occur at such events. This approach is demonstrated, for example, in Wall's (2006) analysis of Northern Soul dancing.

Concerns with social practice and shared meaning distinguish this work from research which focuses on the formal and textual properties of music and the cultural meanings embedded within these. This is not to disregard the essential role of musical repertoire, arrangement and performance as the *raison d'être* for the social event, or indeed the status of skilled performers invited or booked as guests or feature artistes. However, not all participants of amateur music events are musicians and not all of those who do perform are deemed to be fully proficient! It is not enough to explain the coherence and identity of amateur music communities solely as a consequence of shared musical tastes or devotion to specific musical genres; this is especially the case in many contemporary folk clubs which, as I have already asserted, value the practice of shared performance as much as, or more than, an adherence to a repertoire based on strict generic conventions. Amateur musicians are best understood through emphasis on their interactions as socially motivated practices. This approach marks a differentiation between this research and ethnomusicological concerns of music as a form of social or ritualistic expression, by focusing instead on communities which define themselves through their shared interest in the performance of music as a social routine.

Thus, observation of amateur musicians in social, music-making situations is capable of providing evidence of a range of discourses. Foucault's definition of discourse as 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak' (Foucault 1972, p.49) is explained by Paul Long and Tim Wall as 'ideas embedded in what we do, say and think [which] create the terms upon which we know the world' (Long and Wall 2012, p.364). It differentiates the concept of discourse from that of ideology through its focus on the expression of power relationships through practice rather than the reinforcement of powerful ideas through structures of dominance. In line with Foucault's perspective, discourse is viewed not only 'as

the general domain of all statements' or as 'an individualizable group of statements' but also, as I have discussed in Chapter 2.1, 'as a regulated practice that accounts for a number of statements' (Foucault 1972, p.80). 'Regulated practice' implies a shared set of understandings that are institutionalised and driven by set of ideological objectives. Sara Mills reflects on this latter definition of discourse:

> I take this to mean that ... he is interested less in the actual utterances/texts that are
> produced than in the rules and structures which produce particular utterances and texts
> (Mills 2004, p.6)

Discourse theory shares with symbolic interactionism a concern with the production of meanings through practice: social behaviour, activity and interaction. Discourse becomes apparent through identity, shared perceptions of concepts and institutions (acting as common terms of reference), and rituals and routines: modes of activity based on shared perspectives on how things are done and the 'right' way of doing things. It is, according to Foucault, the 'site of conjunction of power and knowledge', in which the utterance of the speaker expresses the extent of that person's power and the institutional context in which the utterance is given shape (Foucault 1980, p.100).

Embedded within discourses, and encapsulating the power and authority articulated through statements, performances and interactions, is a tacit but shared set of definitions of what is valid and accepted by interlocutors. Stuart Hall discusses Foucault's (1980) conceptualisation of these as 'regimes of truth', highlighting the capacity of discourse to define and, through its articulation, produce 'the objects of our knowledge' and 'the way that a topic can be meaningfully talked about' (Hall 2001, p.72). Hence discourses constitute the knowledge and understanding of the world held by specific groups of people in a given geographic and historical location. However, critical analysis of discourse indicates not just the repertoire or substance of knowledge but also the sources of power that are prevalent at that place and at that time, effectively to shape and condition that knowledge. Tuen van Dijk describes power – in particular the social power of groups or institutions – as central to understanding the concept of discourse:

> Summarizing a complex philosophical and social analysis, we will define social power in
> terms of *control*. Thus, groups have (more or less) power if they are able to (more or less)

control the acts and minds of (members of) other groups. This ability presupposes a *power base* of privileged access of scarce social resources, such as force, money, status, fame, knowledge, information, 'culture', or indeed various forms of public discourse and communication… (van Dijk 2001, pp.354-5)

Van Dijk points out that power is not absolute and may only be applied at certain times or in certain circumstances. And of course power can be resisted. When identified as practices of control, he indicates (2001, p.356) that this may be exercised, if only to a limited extent, passively – for example through media usage, consumer choices or, for this study, willingness to attend and support folk clubs. Or it may be more effectively exercised by a person or group with greater access to types of public discourse, such as political or academic or, for this study, the institutionalised discourse of the folk scene, achieved, for example, through a guest singer's celebrity status or a performer's musical skill.

In Chapter 2.3, I discuss some of the issues and practicalities surrounding the critical analysis of discourse but it is useful to indicate here that the starting point for this research is a focus on those 'utterances and texts' (Mills 2004, p.6) which provide a key to understanding discursive practices of amateur music-making. Furthermore, the presence of a discursive framework for music clubs, especially folk clubs, is indicated in their self-regulated practices which appear to be internally driven with no formal institutional entity imposing a universal set of rules or principles – at least in any overt sense. Yet folk clubs from Milton Keynes to Melbourne share many similarities in how they operate and how participants are expected to behave. This raises the question of whether there are other institutional frameworks that they have in common, that determine, influence or regulate the practices of amateur music-making.

My premise is that it is possible to identify several 'external' discourses which exert an influence in social structures and practices whenever an amateur folk club meets and that such discourses are manifested through the presence and dominance of certain institutional values and ideas. This is not to contend that they represent irresistible impositions of power on behalf of external groups with vested interests; indeed not all external discourses present at such events are complementary or cohesive in their impact and some may indeed give

rise to tensions at their points of intersection, providing scope for individuation of detailed approach by different clubs and events. Nevertheless, a process of observation of social interactions and cultural practices shared by amateur musicians and their associates, and the application of an interpretative framework, makes it possible to identify and characterise such discourses.

Among those that I expect to find are:

- the discourse of the 'popular' or 'mainstream' when applied to music as cultural production: within this discourse, 'folk' music is constructed as a generic form and positioned in terms of its 'specialist' appeal;
- the discourse of professionalism when applied to music performance: this manifests itself not only through practices associated with contracts, fees, marketing, press releases, etc. but also in a more figurative and evaluative sense, relating to standards of performance anticipated (and tolerated) in an 'amateur' music setting;
- the regulatory discourse of formal legalistic and bureaucratic frameworks that permit, facilitate or impose limitations on the performance of live music in a public place or in a place of business;
- the institutionalised and 'official' discourse of the 'folk scene', made up of major event organisers, performers, agents, media producers and commentators and establishing agendas of policy, practice and artist popularity.

Addressing these four areas among other discourses not only facilitates an understanding of the contexts in which amateur music-making takes place but also indicates the range of external sources and reference points which provide a framework of meanings and identities for participants.

From ethnomethodology to discourse – seeking a framework for interpretation

Identification and characterisation of discourses, and the intersection of discourses within any social situation, requires observation of practice within a productive interpretative framework. For such an activity to be considered reliable in its outcome, inevitable

questions of methodology surface, highlighting concerns of possible positional conflict inherent in this nature of research activity. Implicit within the act of observing social practice is the intrinsic empiricism of ethnographic method, its reliance on the authority of the researcher as a direct witness or indeed participant, and the integrity of 'objects of study' within their natural environment. However, as an approach to the study of culture, such observation is arguably futile without an interpretative framework and the observer is faced with the daunting task of seeking significance – and indeed justification – for the research itself by unravelling a tangle of findings, determining connections, relationships and points of relevance, and seeking to establish a framework of coherence to provide meaning.

This points to a further problem faced by the ethnographer: a risk that fieldwork notes become the instruments of self-fulfilling prophecy. If the researcher harbours expectations of what may be deduced from real-world observation, and applies a fixed and pre-determined framework of classification to make sense of this observation, then we end up with a set of 'findings' that may be meaningful to him or her but bear little relation to what is meaningful to the protagonists who are being observed. Such findings may be the outcome of an essentially phenomenological approach whereby the actions and utterances of social group members are objectified, decontextualised and relocated into a discourse of scholarly enquiry. This is a concern raised by Paul Willis (1976) in his consideration of the ethnographic research that was central to the work of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (or the 'Birmingham School') and its derivation from the approach associated with the work of Chicago School sociologists which focused on the study of social phenomena and behaviours in their 'natural' settings (among the most frequently cited examples is William Foote Whyte's study of street gangs in Boston, first published in 1943)[15]. Willis was himself one of the few Birmingham School researchers who undertook extensive and long-term fieldwork and immersion in his objects of study: working class boys (*Learning To Labour* 1977) and bike boys and hippies (*Profane Culture* 1978). He was nevertheless critical of traditional fieldwork in which the 'participant observer' adopted a passive role reflecting an

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[15] Whyte's submitted 'Street Corner Society' for his doctoral thesis at the University of Chicago in 1943 but this was actually based on fieldwork that he conducted as a junior fellow at Harvard in the 1930s (Smith 2009).

essentially positivist stance of data collection. Rolf Lindner summarises the implications of this:

> Ethnographic investigations often 'lose' themselves in the life-world of their protagonists, without considering the relationship between this world and the predominant system ... In the face of this, Willis insists on the need to involve in the investigation theoretical knowledge that cannot be directly 'extracted' from the field of enquiry, so as to take account of the historically given circumstances within which the subjects are acting. (Lindner 2000, p.38)

In a paper jointly authored with Mats Trondman, Willis refers to this linkage between theoretical context and direct observation as TIME or 'Theoretically Informed Methodology for Ethnography' (Willis and Trondman 1980, pp.398-401), highlighting a symbiotic relationship between abstract theory and empirical observations such that each can provide an element of 'surprise' to the other:

> Engagement with the 'real' world can bring surprise to theoretical formulations—for instance, as Garfinkel pointed out long ago, concrete living subjects are not the 'cultural dopes' of much structuralist theory—and theoretical resources can bring surprise to how empirical data are understood—bringing a class or feminist perspective to understanding the 'raw' experience of unemployment for instance. (Willis and Trondman 1980, p.399)

In order to establish a coherent and productive theoretical foundation for my own observations, I needed to address the issue of meaningfulness. From my position, not just as a participant observer but also as a participant *per se* – an amateur musician and a follower of folk music, whose own social actions may be, in principle, 'observed' – it is possible to resolve the distinction between what is meaningful to the *researcher* and to the *researched* by making a 'virtue' of my 'inside knowledge' and perspective. In adopting this approach, I am mindful of the essential characteristic of Harold Garfinkel's (1967) ideas on ethnomethodology which recognise the 'practical linguistic and interactional competences' (Holstein and Gubrium 1994, p.264) of social event participants to reinforce their own sense of reality and social relationships through their actions and interactions. Garfinkel's use of the term 'ethnomethodology' alerts us to what he regards as:

> ...the rational properties of indexical expressions and other practical actions as contingent ongoing accomplishments of organized artful practices of everyday life. (Garfinkel 1967, p.11)

For him, the actions of members of a given social group are 'rational' in their own terms rather than in any universal sense. The ways in which things make sense to protagonists define the nature of that social group and its perspective of reality. Expressions and actions are 'indexical' in that their associated meanings are derived from the context of that group – again, rather than referring to any universal code of meanings. This approach offers a way of understanding a social (and cultural) group through its own terms of reference, as opposed to imposing a set of externally conceived, 'objective' criteria and interpreting practices from that dispassionate viewpoint.

Drawing from the work of the Chicago School of sociologists – especially the so-called 'Second Chicago School' (Fine 1995) researchers such as Herbert Blumer (1969) and Erving Goffman (1959, 1961a, 1961b) – the conceptual paradigm of symbolic interactionism offers a means of interpreting ethnographic observations by indicating ways in which protagonists (and this researcher!) 'make sense' of their own experiences as amateur musicians. Through the analogy of social actions as 'performance', it is possible to ascribe a 'rationale', along the lines indicated by Garfinkel, to people's interactive behaviour, based not only on the functionality of the group itself but also on the roles and identities that protagonists take on, in order to participate effectively as members of that group.

Symbolic interactionism

When I observe amateur musicians congregate to perform or listen to music, and look for evidence of discourses, I seem to find that evidence not just in what they say but in how they interact. Their performances symbolise a set of values and assumptions which are shared among them and which provide a sense of coherence to the narrative of events and cohesion to the group's identity.

In this sense, I am happy to concede similarities in my approach to the work of David Grazian (2003) (another Chicago sociologist) in his participant observation study of music clubs in Chicago such as B.L.U.E.S. and its sister club, B.L.U.E.S. Etcetera. More than that, I acknowledge its significant influence in the formulation of my own methodological

approach. Grazian's 'search for authenticity' (as discussed in Chapter 1.5, pages 57-9) is based on an ethnological approach in recording and describing behaviours and statements of protagonists in a series of observed events or dramas and he acknowledges Erving Goffman's dramaturgical framework as a potential key to establishing the cultural consumption of blues music as authentic:

> Goffman argues that all interpersonal encounters represent elaborate theatrical performances, each of us playing a series of roles as we move through life; after all, 'All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players,' as Lord Jacques reminds us in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*. According to Goffman, when we players take refuge from these performances in our most private spaces, or 'backstage' regions, we reveal what we imagine to be our more authentic selves to our intimates and confidants. (Grazian 2003, p.11)

The difficulty with this approach again rests on interpretation though the imposition of an externally derived and evaluative meaning system, in this case a 'test' of 'authenticity', onto the social performances observed. Grazian recognises very early in his study that 'authenticity' is itself a discursive concept:

> ...like life itself, it is a grand performance, and while some performances may be more convincing than others, its status as a contrivance hardly changes as a result (2003, p.11).

He concludes from this that any search for authenticity is necessarily an investigation into how the concept of authenticity is constructed such that it is meaningful in both symbolic and functional ways to punters and tourists, club regulars, club organisers and the musicians themselves. His work thus represents a deconstruction and critical analysis of the discourse of blues music, or rather, the specific mythical association between blues and the urban environment of Chicago.

When I first encountered Grazian's work, I naturally considered whether my search for 'amateur music discourse' might be achieved in a similar way. If a folk club is a 'stage' and the people in it 'merely players' and listeners, it seems possible to identify the basis of a script – a 'text' – in which certain actions and practices carry a special significance: for example, whose turn to perform, where to sit when listening or performing, the ritual of the raffle, the organisation of furniture, the temporal structure of start and finish times, allocation of timed sets and an interval, and so on. All of these seemingly everyday practices,

in an amateur music setting such as a folk club, are of interest because of the meanings attached to them by the participants themselves, meanings which provide a sense of identity and underpin music-making as a cultural practice.

Goffman's analysis of social behaviour is in keeping with the sociological paradigm of symbolic interactionism, based in particular on the work of Herbert Blumer (especially Blumer 1969), and his mentor George Herbert Mead who argued that '(S)ymbolization constitutes objects not constituted before, objects that would not exist except for the context of social relationships wherein symbolization occurs' (Mead 1934, p.78).

Blumer defines symbolic interactionism in dynamic terms of action and interpretative response by people within a social situation:

> The term 'symbolic interactionism' refers, of course, to the peculiar and distinctive character of interaction as it takes place between human beings. The peculiarity exists in the fact that human beings interpret or 'define' each other's actions instead of merely reacting to each other's actions. Their 'response' is not made directly to the actions of one another but instead is based on the meaning which they attach to such actions. Thus, human interaction is mediated by the use of symbols, by interpretation, or by ascertaining the meaning of one another's actions. (Blumer 1969, pp.78-9)

From this perspective, one is able to study the ways in which people make sense of their life-situations on a day-to-day basis. Its particular value, as an interpretive framework, lies in its capacity to analyse interactions within specific and self-defining groups, like amateur musicians in a folk club, by establishing the source and structure of meanings that members of that group attach to the actions of fellow protagonists. It is from within this framework that we are able to identify the apparently shared rules and implicit understandings that underpin their interactions: the discourse of that community. Symbolic interaction appears to offer a way of establishing the 'reality' of the situation, by explaining how participants make sense of it.

This process of analysis represents the essence of interpretivism; social and cultural groups are studied through the way they are experienced by the very people who participate within

them. Their interaction is what makes that group appear to take on its cohesive identity as a community of like-minded people. Robert Prus explains how an interpretivist approach is fundamental to the application of ethnographic methodology through its identification of meanings shared by group members:

> The interpretivists envision human group life as actively constituted by people in interaction with others. Human behaviour is seen as denoting an interpretive, interactive process. The primary methodological procedures are ethnographic (participant-observation, observation, and open-ended interviews) in nature. Human life is studied as it is experienced and accomplished by the very people involved in its production. The interpretivists are centrally concerned with the meanings people attach to their situations and the ways in which they go about constructing their activities in conjunction with others. (Prus 1996, p.9)

Part of my intention, when embarking on this research, was to consider whether symbolic interactionism as a paradigm in itself is enough to shape a descriptive account of observations which may contribute to the understanding of music as a social and cultural practice. In the next section, I expand on some of the issues raised here about my role and perspective as a participant within the 'world' of amateur music-making that is under scrutiny and consider how these have guided and determined my practices as a researcher. But what I hope to have highlighted in this broader discussion on the theoretical framework of this research is the methodological dilemma which I have faced and which relates to the authority and plausibility of my findings. This dilemma may be encapsulated within two questions:

- Does the authority rest in the objectivity of this work? Should I be claiming that the case study folk clubs are 'typical' of a wider population and that inferences drawn from my observations are universal?
- Or does the authority rest in my familiarity with the local folk scene, putting me in a unique position to arrive at conclusions that could not be reached by anyone else?

My argument – which I hope to demonstrate as an escape from the dilemma – is that symbolic interactionism does seem to offer a workable framework for interpretation, taking it beyond the mere subjective and idiosyncratic and offering genuine characterisation of a discourse inhabited by amateur musicians at events such as folk clubs.

Chapter 2.3: Research Activity and Interpretation

<u>Indexicality, reflexivity and participant observation</u>

Underpinning the methodological issues surrounding ethnography, discussed in the previous section, is the critical concern with the role of the researcher as observer and interpreter. In my case, I have argued that engagement with amateur music-making practices, from a perspective based on personal experience and 'inside knowledge', offers potential to reflect critically on the factors that give meaning to the structured social relationships and identities experienced by participants at such events, thus affording me a more privileged insight than one which may be available to a first-time observer.

In reinforcement of this point, it is appropriate here to offer a statement on my role as an ethnographic researcher with particular reference to the importance of 'place' in carrying out this research. The 'privileged insight' that I claim is by no means an automatic consequence of my position as an 'insider' witness to music-making events, as this would infer a perspective of ethnography as 'being at the right place at the right time' to underpin the authority of conclusions drawn from my observations. Instead, I would assert that my position as a *scholar*, engaged in ethnographic research, requires perception of a physical and social environment (a folk club) where specific rules and structures of meaning give shape to the shared experiences of those who interact within that environment, *including myself*. These rules and structures interest me as a researcher but are more readily accessible to me as a *participant*, a musician, a fellow folk enthusiast.

I acknowledge that this is clearly a point for contention within social science practice, placing the burden on me to make a case for the veracity and applicability of the conclusions drawn from my research. I have already made reference to two authorities on which I may build my case: Garfinkel's (1967) ethnomethodology which entails identification of meaningful expressions and actions of his subjects, and Bourdieu's (1990) reflexive sociology. I intend now to explore the value of applying these concepts to the activities that I have engaged in to record and interpret my findings.

Garfinkel offers a sociological perspective to the interpretation of people's lived experience based on the notion of 'common culture' (1967, p.76). This can be 'discovered' by the social scientist, he argues, from within the 'common sense knowledge of social structures' (pp.76-7) that is shared and understood by society members. Not only field workers but all researchers engaged in sociological investigation require access to the body of knowledge embedded within these social structures. The significance of this for social enquiry is summarised by Kenneth Leiter:

> (Garfinkel) has sought to divorce the theory of action from its traditional preoccupation with motivational issues and to recentre it on the knowledgeable ways in which, whether consciously or not, social actors recognize, produce and reproduce social actions and social structures. (Leiter 1980, pp.225-6)

Thus, rather than theorise possible causes for social action by applying an interpretive framework from outside the domain being studied, Garfinkel has advocated a search for meanings, and the structures that produce these meanings, from *within* social life, so that social actions may be explained in terms of their significance – their 'meaningfulness' – to the actors themselves. The methodological approach that he is advocating is based on an interpretive paradigm that considers how actors *make sense* of their social situation through shared access and reference to the context of that situation. Garfinkel applies the concept of indexicality to describe this (Garfinkel 1967, Garfinkel and Sacks 1970). Within a social situation, meanings that people attach to objects or practices are dependent on (and linked to) a shared set of understandings – a context of meaning. People's ability to act out that situation, and to interact with each other, requires them to assume roles and identities appropriate to that situation, that is through a process of intersubjectivity which is a central concept within symbolic interactionist theory (Prus 1996).

This raises a practical issue for me as the participant observer of amateur music-making practices. In order to interpret my own observations, gleaned through personal interaction within the social situation of a folk club, it is unrealistic to suggest that I can in some way shut myself off *post hoc* from the situation under scrutiny, to reflect on it objectively from the scholarly perspective of the social scientist, and to arrive at a set of conclusions on

structures of meaning that would have been inaccessible during the 'heat of the moment' – the social event itself. The objects and practices that constitute that social situation are perceived as significant within the system of signification that make that situation socially meaningful. Therefore, to interpret them, it is necessary for me to draw on those meaning systems myself, systems that define my own identity as a musician, folk fan and participant in a music-making event. Hence the process of *indexicality* – the derivation of meaning of objects and practices from context – is intertwined with that of *reflexivity* – the paradox that these objects and practices can only be perceived as such within the meaning systems that frame my interpretation of them. This may suggest a relativist position for the participant observer but the underlying characteristic of ethnomethodology is the impossibility of 'knowledge' to be fully objective.

Reflexivity is also a central concept to Pierre Bourdieu's interpretive approach to sociology. Within his perspective, social events and phenomena may be understood not only through a framework of meanings that provide substance to the domain, or 'field' in which they occur, but also through the power relationships that are embedded, reinforced and legitimised by that framework. For the purposes of this research, the 'folk scene', as perceived by those who form part of it or those who hold views on it, may be regarded as a 'field' in that it complies with Bourdieu's definition of the term as 'a network, or configuration, of objective relations between positions' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p.97). In other words, it is a set of discourses which shape and regulate particular modes of practice and social action. In order to engage with the 'field' of institutions and social practices which constitute the 'folk scene', I need to draw on the combined terms of reference of the researcher-practitioner, or, in Bourdieu's terminology, the 'habitus' where social norms that constitute a framework of appropriate thought and action are acquired through socialisation to establish dispositions for people's responses to specific social situations (Wacquant 2004, pp.316-7, Navarro 2006, p.16). Within this framework is a set of experiences and knowledge, or 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu 1986). This is possessed to varying degrees by each participant to determine the authority and significance of their actions within the social situation. The cultural capital invested in me as an academic *and* as a practitioner has implications for the social relationships that I share with participants of amateur music events. The situation itself evokes a habitus through which the most appropriate form of behaviour and

interaction for me is one of that signifies full immersion by playing guitar, singing, listening to and talking about music and socialising with fellow participants as friends, colleagues and 'folkies'. My 'status' *as an academic researcher* provides me with authority to engage in more overt research activities outside that social situation: to conduct interviews and instigate social media discussions in the name of 'research'. As a field researcher however, a potential exists for tension and conflict from what may be perceived as 'inappropriate' social engagement, for example, if I were observed to be taking copious notes at a folk club or making audio and video recordings of social interactions without permission or explanation of the purpose of such recordings, especially as my 'objects of study' are the behaviours and practices within the overall situation of the folk club, not just the musical performances themselves.

Taking into account the differing codes and expectations of social behaviour associated with participation and observation, the early stages of my research did involve some attempts at fieldwork notation. I would visit folk clubs, play an active role as a participating musician and folk enthusiast and then rely on my memory of significant events that occurred during the evening to write down or tape-record a set of verbal observations while sitting in my car parked outside the venue at the end of the evening. This was a similar approach to one adopted by David Grazian to 'conceal' his motivation as a sociologist when engaging with visitors, staff and musician at blues clubs and to present a more 'appropriate' role as a fellow musician and customer.

> About two or three times a week, I would arrive at one of these clubs shortly after their house bands began their first set, order a beer, and strike up open-ended barroom conversations with audience members during which I would ask them about their general tastes in music, expectations of the club, and their reflections on Chicago ... When the clubs closed at two o'clock in the morning, I would usually head home and type up my field observations from the evening, documenting these barroom encounters to the best of my recollection. Likewise, whenever possible I attempted to jot down notes at the clubs, and frequently an intriguing conversation would send me to the men's rest room so I could scribble down a particularly juicy quote onto a cocktail napkin (Grazian 2003, p.19).

As the research process developed, however, it became apparent that the accumulated historical detail of people's utterances and actions, while considerable in quantity, would not

in themselves offer much impetus for revelation and insight. The more raw data I collected, the less relevant it became. Dated transcripts of running orders and repertoires of individual floor singers, detailed accounts of room layouts, 'objective' statistics of audience numbers broken down into subjectively determined categories, narrative accounts of specific dramas and interactions – all of this type of information signified an attempt at meticulous data-gathering practices in keeping with traditional anthropology but over time risked offering little more than anecdotal vignettes which could be interpreted in innumerable ways. While signifying a research position based on empirical integrity (and dispassionate observation), this manner of data collection was ironically proving to produce outcomes that were at odds with the objectives normally associated with participant-observation.

Robert Prus describes the participant-observer role as one which:

> … allows the researcher to get infinitely closer to the lived experiences of the participants than does straight observation. Their experiences as participants may afford researchers with invaluable vantage points for appreciating certain aspects of particular life-worlds. (Prus 1996, p.19)

Its authority lies in its claim for authenticity through the value-free recording of events and phenomena in their natural environment. However, the act of recording cannot, in itself guarantee the validity of any conclusions drawn from it. There is always room for debate on the reliability of the researcher's own perception: how has the data been selected and categorised and have the recordings reflected a predisposition by the researcher to identify data as significant if it already fits in with a framework of expectations? Doubt also arises over the extent to which meaningful conclusions might be drawn from the analysis of the data recorded: not only its typicality but also its status as a 'research finding'. In other words, has the act of scholarly research overemphasised the significance of the data – and the interpretation of that data – by separating it out of its 'real world' context? In Bourdieu's terms, does the participant's assumption of the role of 'researcher' constitute a 'habitus' that calls for a specific and nuanced engagement with the 'field' through its apparent objectification? The researcher's world becomes an 'object of study' which, within a discourse of scholarship, takes on an artificially distanced, alienated quality.

For the participant-observer who is immersed in the subject matter, the solution to this philosophical conundrum rests in acknowledgement that interpretation of one's finding are *necessarily intersubjective* and the position from which these findings are interpreted is *necessarily reflexive*. In seeking to identify the nature of social relationships which create – and are created by – discourses and to establish and lay bare the dynamics of power expressed through cultural practice, the researcher needs not only to interrogate the motivations of social actors but also to reveal the structures and conditions that give meaning to their actions.

As the focus of this research is the cultural phenomenon of amateur music-making, it is appropriate to apply a musical metaphor to illustrate this point. A musical composition may be recorded on stave such that its combination of notes, its tempo and its structure is accessible to anyone who can read music. However, the extent to which a performer is able to convey the artistic motivation of the composer, and to capture the intrinsic creative quality of nuanced and affective expression that the composer sought to achieve, cannot be guaranteed by reproducing the notation. Performers always interpret and interpretations always vary. While some performers may seek to capture the artistic intentions of the composer, others may make it their own and present it in new and intriguing ways. The song or tune is still recognisable as a socially shared 'text' but its meaning is not intrinsic to the notes alone. It becomes appropriated by the actors in the social activity to take on a particular here-and-now set of meanings during the moment of performance, meanings that are dependent on the intersubjective frameworks of identity and social cohesion that provides the setting for that performance. It is considerably more likely for the 'true' meaning to be shared and understood from within the intersubjectively defined community than it is from interpreting notes on paper.

My concern that the collection of 'raw' data of personal observation opened up a multitude of possible interpretations, whilst simultaneously connoting an artificial aura of objectivity, was addressed to some degree in the latter stages of this research by the production of personal narrative accounts of my visits to the clubs selected for case study. This served as an attempt to reflect, rather than deny, my own intersubjective engagement with the events as described, instead of objectifying them as dispassionate historical records. I resolved to

write down these accounts in a literary form that might appear in a descriptive diary, such that they constituted not only a personal record of observations and interactions, but also an indicator of what they meant to me at the time. The purpose of these accounts was an attempt to establish evidence of my engagement, both as a participating musician and as an observing and interpreting researcher, with the specific domains of amateur music-making under scrutiny. They were written in a descriptive narrative format, designed to provide an accessible word-picture of my perceptions and experience of the event. This extract from one account of an evening at one of the case study events, Sly Old Dogs and Friends, serves to illustrate the style of writing:

> Musicians already in their places (stage right) are Colin and Martin, both locals and regulars. Martin's wife Margaret sits at an adjacent table, not next to but near her husband. They are joined by Maggie, who has driven some 12 miles from Leamington and brought her guitar to take part in tonight's session. Seated stage left is 'Banjo' Dave who has travelled from Coventry. His partner and her friend are seated at the very back of the room where they are less involved in the music but able to enjoy a night out while Dave indulges himself as part of the team of musicians.
>
> As I normally take on the MC role when I attend the SLOGS sessions, I select a seat centre stage and set up both guitars on stands plus my music stand. Richard takes the space to my left and sets out his range of instruments that he will use that night – guitar, tin whistle, harmonica and euphonium. Bob and Paul take the seats to my right, each of them busying themselves with instrument stands, tuning up and generally preparing for the evening's entertainment. Bob has brought his bazouki and banjo; Paul is armed with guitar, mandolin and bodhrán. I hand out printed drinks vouchers to band members and to Colin and Martin, based on an arrangement with Paco, the owner of the pub, for a free drink to be provided to up to seven musicians (the five band members plus the two regulars).

The account is written in the present tense and describes actions and their rationale, embellished with some brief description and occasional phrases of figurative rhetoric. Through these basic literary devices, the narrative appears to move closer to Prus's characterisation of participant-observation (1996, p.19) by providing at least a personal vantage point of the particular life-world of amateur musicians. Such diary-style accounts have thus offered a further dimension for analysis, for example in the determination of event formats, as sign-vehicles or 'object-signs', on the nature of interaction between

participants at specific musicking events, and the roles and identities that they appeared to assume in the process (see Chapter 4.5).

Amateur music-making in microcosm: the use of case studies

An ethnographic study necessarily demands the identification and selection of case study folk clubs for first-hand observation and, as I discuss in Chapter 3.4, the factors of typicality of each club and expediency of observing them have equally important parts to play in this process. Related to typicality is the capability of the music event to produce findings of broader significance; if the existence of universal rules and rituals are to be extrapolated from specific observations of social interaction, the authority of such an analysis relies on the assumption that the events, while distinctive in their character, are *recognisable* as conforming to participants' understandings of 'folk clubs', 'music sessions', 'singarounds', etc., through constituent elements drawn from – and identified within – the 'field' of study. The concepts of indexicality and reflexivity are therefore just as applicable to the case study selection as they are to the observations themselves, if only to counter concerns that the choice of case studies results in a self-fulfilling prophecy of the findings and conclusions derived from their analysis. The capacity of the case study events to produce significant findings also relates to the factor of expediency, especially when my presence as a researcher is taken into account. Participant observation relies on the acceptance by participants of the presence of the observer; what better way to ensure this, than to select case studies where this observer is already known and accepted as a member of the local folk music community and – in the case of Sly Old Dogs and Friends – as an active participant through performance, hosting and organisation?

The process of plotting a field for the observation of amateur music-making practices called for consideration of further factors that related to the purpose of this research and were taken into account in my decision not to select other venues known to, or frequented by, amateur musicians in the Coventry and Warwickshire area. Central to these was the focus of this research on *amateur* music practice as opposed to *folk* music practice. It is true that folk clubs and certain other folk music events provide an appropriate and potentially productive

scenario for this focus for a number of structural and discursive reasons. Folk clubs mainly rely on non-professional performers, both economically and philosophically; the ethos of folk as a cultural phenomenon (if not as a genre) might be defined as open, inclusive, community-based, informal and social. The 'fluffed' chords and flat notes of the inexperienced amateur musician and singer are indulged and tolerated while the virtuosity of practised and accomplished performers wishing to share their skills and repertoire in a non-commercial environment is admired and welcomed, at least if they are perceived as exemplifying a style and musical approach associated with folk within its dominant, institutional discursive framework. The simplicity and accessibility of the floor artist's songs and tunes, the communal spirit of joining in with choruses and banter, the quirkiness of raffle prizes and the impromptu and largely improvised running order all contribute to the seemingly unstructured environment that is typical of many folk clubs and constitutes, in essence, a domain of the 'amateur' in its purest sense: music-making that is motivated primarily by participants' commitment and attachment to the music itself.

While folk clubs offer a suitable field of study, many of the folk events in the 20-mile radius of Warwick, Coventry and Monks Kirby were excluded from the initial selection of potential case studies on the basis that their structure and mode of organisation delimited (in some cases prohibited) scope for a fulfilling *amateur* music-making experience. Larger, concert-style folk clubs, for example, offered potential for analysis of folk music as a contemporary cultural movement through their programmes of professional and semi-professional guest and support artists and their repertoires and stylistic approaches as performers, but provided less insight into music-making as a predominantly amateur practice, even though the organisers and resident artists could hardly be said to be making a living from their involvement in these events. Pub music sessions reflecting the structures and conventions of the Irish *craic* also remain a popular and regular feature of the local folk music circuit; observation of these gives rise to a range of interesting questions on skilled musical performance as a communal activity, based on shared rules and knowledges of structures and repertoires. However such questions are more appropriate to ethnomusicological concerns with performance competence and cultural tradition and transposition, than with my concern with 'musicking' as a basis of social interaction and intersubjectivity.

Other amateur music practices in the locality could provide material for further research that might offer future development from – or responses to – the approach and framework of analysis applied in this work. To my knowledge, there are at least two home-based music-making events that occur in a regular basis involving participants on the Coventry and Warwickshire folk circuit. One of these is a monthly gathering of predominantly unaccompanied singers who met and performed in a public house several years ago as the Coventry Folk Club but have continued the tradition as personal guests in the home of the original organiser. The other, The Coventry Songwriters' group, is a popular and expanding group of singer-songwriters who meet in each others' homes, also on a monthly basis, to perform newly-composed songs based on an agreed thematic challenge. Under the direction of a well-known figure of the local folk club circuit, this group has now organised itself to record two CD albums, give live performances on local radio, appear as featured guests in folk clubs and other venues and provide a programme of entertainment for one Midlands folk festival. While both of these represent impressive feats of organisation and dedication on the part of their members, their format and function are somewhat idiosyncratic and, for the purposes of this research, would necessarily highlight issues which are peculiar to them but potentially distracting from the central purpose of this research to explore more universal discursive features of amateur music-making.

Initial research activities were tentative and exploratory. From the outset I had intended to gather and record observations of events, routines, repertoires and settings which could lend themselves to critical scrutiny and interpretation as evidence of music-making discourse and influences of external discourses. To achieve this, I had established a range of event formats that offered potential for comparative observation: guest nights, singers' (or performers') nights, singarounds and sessions, plus a set of differing circumstances which would determine my own level of engagement as an audience member, performer or compère. In the spirit of Garfinkel, observations would be described in accordance with their own terms of reference rather than evaluated against a pre-determined set of criteria, and would be complemented by detailed interviews with organisers of two of the venues to establish the existence of club policies, routines, philosophies, histories and contexts providing discursive indicators which may serve to frame my interpretations or simply offer illustration of practices and the motivations behind them. As a diagnostic exercise I also

subjected my own views, as a central figure in the Sly Old Dogs sessions, to the same thematic structure I had devised for the questions raised with the organisers of the other two case study clubs. I wrote down my responses and considered including extracts from the transcript in the same way that I had for their responses but, on consideration, rejected this approach on the basis that its patina of objectivity would transform the element of personal observation – vital to the integrity of auto-ethnography – into a methodological ritual, constituting a disingenuous and contrived set of 'pseudo-findings'.

Interviews

In keeping with Prus's characterisation of the ethnographic interview – 'careful and receptive listening, open-ended queries, and extensive probing' (Prus 1996, p.20) – my interviews with Norman Wheatley and Karen Orgill, respectively organisers of the Warwick Folk Club and The Tump Folk Club, were designed to provoke reflective responses to an agenda of topics. In both cases, I began each interview with an outline of this agenda, emphasising that it represented a broad range of themes that I intended to explore through open discussion. These themes were:

- Respondents' personal background, motivation and perspectives
- Their approach to the organisation of the folk club
- Their reflections on the content and practices of the club and its relationship with others in the local folk circuit
- The impact and influence of external institutions (agents, media, PRS, licensing authorities, brewery, etc.)

(See *Appendix A* for my interview rationale and framework)

Despite this common thematic structure, the interviews proved to be dissimilar research experiences producing different types of response in terms of content, mode of discussion and articulation of personal experience. To some extent this reflected the backgrounds and experience of the individuals themselves. Norman's involvement in the folk scene stretches back to the 1970s during which time he has been active as a performer and a broadcaster;

he presented *Mercia Folk*, a weekly programme about folk music broadcast in the Coventry and Warwickshire region from 1980 by the former commercial radio station Mercia Sound. In comparison, at the time of the interview, Karen described herself as 'only nine in folk years', following her first direct encounter with folk music when a local band performed traditional Irish and Scottish music at a family party.

The interview with Norman took place in his home while Karen's interview was on 'common ground' in the function room of the social club where The Tump used to meet. The choices of location were largely based on mutual convenience but appeared to have an impact on the tone of the interview and the nature of the responses. In his own domestic territory, Norman was relaxed and willing to provide more detailed, elaborated and reflective responses, sometimes straying from the point of the question (although this was not discouraged by me). His experience as a broadcaster and his long-term involvement with the local folk scene were also contributory factors to his engagement with the topics of discussion; he was confident in the opinions that he expressed and frequently referred to – and described in some depth – examples and anecdotes to illustrate points that he raised.

In contrast, Karen's responses were less elaborated and her expression sometimes reflected an implicit understanding and knowledge of the local folk circuit that she shared with me as interviewer such that she tended to provide fewer examples or illustrations and less descriptive detail. My impression was that her responses were more in keeping with the role that she adopts when running an evening at The Tump; rather than taking on an overt presentational persona as a compère or performer, she applies a 'managerial' approach, setting up the location, planning a running order of performers and appointing a compère for the evening while remaining unobtrusive throughout most of the event, seated at the admissions desk by the door to welcome arriving participants. Hence I noticed from the recordings of the interviews that I found myself prompting Karen more to expand on points that she raised while Norman needed less encouragement. Despite their differences in style, both interviews provided a productive framework of experience and perspectives on the part of organisers which afforded me a richer basis for interpretation of my observations and reflections of the clubs themselves.

In this respect, the interviews fulfilled a purpose to guide and reaffirm interpretations, gleaned from my observation of interactions within the clubs themselves. However, as investigative devices in the research of amateur music-making practices, they reflect a more fundamental rationale. They provide a record of articulated views and experiences from individuals who are not only instrumental in the practices, principles and routines that are specific to their clubs, but are also embedded within the framework of meanings that are shared by participants of these music-making events. Hence their responses offer insight into the intersubjective nature of their – and the participants' – experience and sense of identity within a social domain structured around the performance and sharing of music. Prus refers to 'a more viable sense of intersubjectivity' (1996, p.20) as a quality that is achieved through the greater openness and receptiveness of the ethnographic interview:

> ...without this opportunity to uncover, ascertain, and qualify the meanings that others hold for objects in their life-worlds and the ways in which people go about accomplishing their activities in practice, it would make little sense to talk about studying human lived experience. (Prus 1996, pp.20-1)

During each of the interviews, the exchanges between the club organiser (as a source of insights) and myself (known to each organiser as a local folk musician and writer, but now presenting myself as an academic researcher) established and reinforced a role relationship specific to the occasion and based on expectations of outcomes, both explicitly expressed and implied, and notions of appropriate interactive performance. The specific roles to be adopted were signalled in various ways: the location, the time of day, the style of language used, the nature of my questions, the proxemic arrangements and the presence of a notepad and tape recorder as confirmation of a discursive framework in which utterances would be transcribed and presented as permanent evidence in the development of a scholarly thesis. The circumstance of each interview was thus not immune to the intersubjective process of Goffmanesque role-play, nor to the reflexive framework within which the dialogues between researcher and interviewee were articulated and meaningful. The ethnographic spirit in which the interviews were conducted, as open, loosely structured and largely non-prescriptive explorations of views and experience, served to reduce the formality of a more overtly rule-bound and 'scientific' form of enquiry, allowing space for the social relationship that was already established between interlocutors as fellow-participants

in the local folk music circuit. Hence my interviewees appeared to be relaxed, willing to talk openly and able to discuss topics from within a shared framework of knowledge and experience, without the need of explication of concepts and histories that may be less familiar outside that framework. This is illustrated by a transcript extract from my interview with Norman Wheatley, when we were discussing how and why he first became involved in Warwick Folk Club. To develop his argument, he referred to the performance of music to an audience as an experience that he and I have in common:

Q: How long have you been there?

Norman: I think about three and a half years.

Q: And what do you get out of it?

Norman: I ask myself that sometimes (laughs), especially on a night when you think you've put on a great guest and for whatever reason the audience doesn't turn out. It's when it goes well, I suppose. When you do have a good night ... you genuinely enjoy it. I suppose it's the difference between doing a radio programme – you never quite know how a radio programme has gone down apart from a letter or two. But with the folk club ... you can get an immediate reaction and it's a bigger audience than you used to get on local radio (!) (laughs). Why do you perform? It's because, as performers know, you get some kind of buzz and connection from performing – it's not just the applause – singing songs that you like and realising that somebody else has appreciated that. So, on a slightly wider scale, you put on a group that you like – presumably organisers put on people that they like – and when the whole crowd appreciates the group that the organiser likes, yeah it's a good thing.

Social media survey

It was on the basis of a similar set of relationships and shared perspectives that I also sought to provoke discussion in the virtual domain of the Facebook social network site. This served as an 'added layer' of perspectives, offered in a relatively public domain, of regular folk club participants or, in some cases, individuals with less positive experiences of folk clubs. The discussions produced statements of opinion and anecdotes on a number of issues identified by respondents when invited to reflect on their experiences of – and attitudes towards – folk clubs as music-based social events. Similar to the interviews with case study club organisers,

responses were gathered and recorded from a loosely-structured research process in which I sought to instigate discussion by making an appeal within a public forum for Facebook users, interested in folk music, to volunteer their views on a broadly-stated basis that these would be of value for my academic research project on 'amateur music venues as places of social interaction' (see *Appendix B*). In making this appeal, I presented myself under my 'stage name' of 'Pete Willow' (see footnote on page 3); while the appeal did not explicitly state that I am personally involved in folk music as a performer and writer, it was potentially viewed initially by over 800 'friends' of my 'Pete Willow' Facebook page, many of whom are aware of my involvement with a significant proportion who know me personally or have met me 'in real life' at folk music events. The appeal was further extended to several Facebook special interest groups, in most case at the invitation of the person managing the group's page on the site. These groups were: Bedworth Folk Club (Warwickshire), Woburn Sands Folk Music Sessions (Buckinghamshire), The G String Acoustic Club (Yorkshire), Stratford-upon-Avon Folk Club (Warwickshire), Folk Monthly (the Facebook group for a Midlands folk magazine published by the *Traditional Arts Team*), The UK Folk Club Network (the Facebook group for *Folk 21*) and 'Music Promotion and PR' – a Facebook group that I had started in 2010.

As indicated in the wording of the appeal, the survey was designed to prompt responses that reflected participants' own terms of reference. No specific respondents were sampled and targeted and no detailed questionnaire was devised. The exercise was based on three broad exploratory questions, inviting comments on the standard of music played at folk clubs, the organisation of the club and the importance of folk clubs in respondents' personal lives:

- For an enjoyable night out at the folk club, how important is the standard of music being played? Is this the most important factor or are there other things more important? (Facebook Survey 1)
- What are the most important aspects of the way that a club is organised that make it a good night out for you? (Facebook Survey 2)
- Thinking about how you live your life and what you want out of life, how significant is attending folk clubs for you as an individual? (Facebook Survey 3)

The questions were posted one after the other during a six-day time span. After a rapid and often detailed and eloquent set of responses to the first question – 65 public responses in total plus two private messages – the second question was posted 24 hours later (*Appendix C*) to produce 16 public responses and, again, two private messages. The third question was published after another five days (*Appendix D*) and this produced a further 16 public responses plus five private messages. Some of the later responses addressed points raised in two or all three of the questions and others were responses to comments made by contributors.

There was evidence of some detailed consideration on the part of some respondents with contributions presented as lengthy anecdotes, bullet lists or, what might be described as 'rants' about negative experiences of the organisation of folk clubs and musical skills of floor singers. One respondent publicly criticised the survey itself as a method of research on the basis that it was 'too open', and 'would not gather a valid data set' because of such 'unconsidered variables' as types of folk club, and social strata within the ethnographic catchment area. Nevertheless, in keeping with its rationale based on reflexivity and intersubjectivity, the openness of this research method generated a rich stream of articulated viewpoints and experiences that lent themselves to thematic analysis, providing testimonies that served to illustrate a range of issues explored in this research, in particular: attitudes towards music-making as a social or community event, expectations of the 'folk club' experience, notions of professionalism and its place within this experience, and personal engagement with music-making within a folk club environment. The survey produced observations that may not have been gleaned or predicted from a more systematic and structured methodological approach, for example on personal engagement with amateur music events:

> I have had a long history of depression. Fortunately I have been well these last couple of years. My Doctor at the time had a firm belief in the healing power of music (well the cheerful kind) and encouraged me to listen to lots of music, and to make the effort to get out of the house and attend folk clubs. I think this has been instrumental in overcoming the pain of divorce and the stressful effects of bullying at work. (Facebook Survey 3)[16]

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[16] I gave an undertaking to all respondents that they would not be identified by name. Therefore, accreditation for statements quoted here will refer only to the survey to which they responded.

or anecdotal personalised accounts of incidents that illustrate broader issues, for example, on the attitudes and perspectives of folk club organisers:

> A classic example of a folk club 'blowing it' was when a friend of mine took his friend to a singers night at a folk club near Bristol. They got there early and he asked if his friend could do a spot as she was really good. The friend in question was Dolores Keane, but no-one recognised her. She didn't mind. She didn't get a spot in the first half, went to the bar and my friend suggested that they might like to give his friend a spot in the second half. ... The organiser, who had done three songs to the other people's one or two, said ' if we have time'. The second half started and the organiser did another three songs. Dolores did not get a spot but had an enjoyable evening anyway. She knew nothing of the conversation between my friend and the organiser. My friend took great delight at the end of the evening in telling the organiser that it was a shame they hadn't given his friend a spot and that if they wanted to hear her sing they should go her concert the following night and pay £10 to see her when they could have all heard her for nothing. (Facebook Survey 2)

It is, of course, possible that reflections and narratives such as these may have emerged from a series of one-to-one interviews. However, the basis of this survey in a virtual public domain enabled responses to be presented as contributions to an open forum discussion (with the option of providing responses by private message, as taken up by the respondent discussing his depression), combined with respondents' ability to construct replies in the relatively secluded circumstances of communicating via computer or smartphone. These may have been significant contributory factors in the survey's capacity to produce elaborated and discursive responses within a form of community discussion and interaction, constituting a dynamic formulation of expressed 'public opinion' on the topic of amateur music-making and folk clubs.

Concluding comments

Having outlined methods of investigation and the theoretical frameworks that have underpinned their rationale, the issue of interpretation also requires some examination. This brings us back to the methodological concern of viability and authority when applying the essentially experiential approach of ethnography through participant observation.

Garfinkel's (1967) use of the term indexicality reminds us that research 'outputs', which may be treated as 'findings' within an established paradigm of knowledge-building through scientific enquiry and data acquisition, are incapable of achieving a value-free status; their significance may only be established within a framework of meanings which simultaneously positions the researcher as an actor within a social world and the 'findings' as inextricably linked to the values, concepts and epistemological conditions that provide shape and texture to that world. Harking back to Dewey's advocacy of pragmatism (1929), we are left with one option of escape from the philosophical paradox of the uncertainty of knowledge in its relation to human action, arising from its necessary articulation within a shifting framework of intersubjective interpretations of 'truth'. As I indicated at the beginning of this chapter, the escape route lies in Garfinkel's 'common sense knowledge of social structures' (1967, pp.76-7), which by its nature draws the reader of this dissertation into the same conceptual framework that enables me, as participant-observer *and* interpreter to construct and present my thesis. While this is based on 'findings' which can never be value-free, they nevertheless 'make sense' as contributions to our understanding of amateur music-making as social and cultural practice.

In pursuance of this, I shall apply a two-stage approach to the interpretation of observations and responses gleaned from my research activities. The first entails an application of a symbolic interactionist perspective in an attempt to characterise the 'text' of amateur music-making. This is based on the identification of object-signs (and practices) which have an intersubjective significance for protagonists, i.e. being part of the 'club' entails sharing an understanding of the role and significance of objects and the ways their combined presence within the 'world' of the folk club enables them symbiotically to reinforce their meanings through providing contexts for each other within that environment.

The second stage shifts my perspective from 'text' to 'context' by considering the presence and influence of discourses, seemingly located 'outside' the specific domain of the music-making event but nevertheless serving to shape and regulate the practices of amateur musicians and their audiences through their imposition of externally-sourced meaning systems. In this way, it is possible to view the 'moment' of amateur music-making from Christopher Small's 'musicking' perspective: a convergence and intersection of socially,

culturally and aesthetically driven experiences through which the 'performance' takes on a meaning for itself and for the identities of its protagonists.

Before embarking on this analytical journey, the next chapter 'sets the stage' or territory in which the object-signs and discursive frameworks manifest themselves and provides a brief description and characterisation of each of the three case study folk clubs.

Chapter 3 – The Case Studies: exploring the settings

Chapter 3.1: Case Study #1 – Sly Old Dogs and Friends

'Are you looking for some good music? Then what are you doing here?'

The customary call-out by the master of ceremonies for the monthly 'Sly Old Dogs and Friends' music session effectively silences the hubbub in the function room of the village pub and the twenty-five occupants settle down to a Sunday evening of musical entertainment and good-natured banter. Many of them are here solely as audience members who participate in the conventional manner through applause, reaction to jokes and comments, singing along with choruses and in some cases engaging in humorous verbal exchanges with the performing musicians. The performers themselves are either members of the resident group or musicians and singers who have come along to join in. None of the performers receive payment (although there is an arrangement for each resident musician to claim one free drink from the owner of the public house) and there is no admission charge for the audience. The monthly event is one of hundreds across the UK in which amateur musicians meet in a public space to perform and share music and entertain an audience.

Sly Old Dogs is the collective name adopted by a group of five musicians: Bob plays banjo, bouzouki and guitar, Richard plays guitar, tin whistle, harmonica and euphonium, Paul plays guitar, banjo, mandolin and bodhran, Nigel plays fiddle and mandolin and I play guitar. With the exception of Nigel, all of us take turns with lead vocals. The band members, all in our late 50s and early 60s were previously members of different line-ups of a Warwickshire-based folk group The Oddsods which performed and recorded mainly Irish traditional folk songs and tunes for 15 years before disbanding in 2008. Sly Old Dogs emerged primarily to continue hosting a popular monthly music session in the East Warwickshire village of Monks Kirby, which used to be organised by members of The Oddsods. Most members of the present band are also active as members of other local folk groups.

The monthly gatherings usually take place on the last Sunday evening of each month in a privately owned public house and restaurant, The Bell Inn, one of two such establishments in the village. The location is set in a Green Belt area in which the village is surrounded by farms, woodland and smaller hamlets[17]. Monks Kirby is a designated conservation area, founded in the 7th century and with a population of 434 (2001 census). However, it has played host to folk music events since the late 1960s when its other public house, The Denbigh Arms was the location for a club run by a local Irish folk group, The Gaels (Skiers 1969). Folk events in the village regularly attract visitors from both sides of the Warwickshire-Leicestershire border plus the nearby conurbations of Coventry and Rugby; Monks Kirby even hosted a small folk festival in the 1980s with a programme of concerts, music sessions and dance displays in both public houses and the village hall. The music sessions hosted by The Oddsods took place in an upstairs room at The Denbigh Arms but the Sly Old Dogs sessions relocated to The Bell Inn in 2011.

Sly Old Dogs and Friends is usually attended by at least four members of the group. One of them takes on the role of compère for the evening. This task normally falls on myself but any of the group members will fulfil this function when asked to, if I am not available. The group is joined by two regular musicians who live in the village, Colin (who sings and plays guitar) and Martin (who sings unaccompanied or plays violin) plus other musicians who often perform in folk clubs, acoustic nights and music sessions in pubs and venues of Coventry, Rugby and other parts of Warwickshire and the neighbouring county of Leicestershire. On a typical night, ten musicians and singers are in attendance, rarely fewer and sometimes as many as 16. Audience numbers have been known to exceed 35 although there is a hard core group of approximately fifteen regulars.

Apart from word-of-mouth promotion, the evenings are publicised each month by a series of posters (*Appendix E*) produced and printed by Colin who also sends out electronic copies by email using a mailing list that he compiled on his own initiative. In addition, I post an 'event' announcement each month on the Facebook social networking site (*Appendix F*),

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[17]   Monks Kirby Parish Plan, 2006.

sending invitations to any 'friends' listed on my Facebook account who are known to have attended previous sessions. The session is also included in a 'What's On' listing published in an entertainments supplement of the *Coventry Telegraph* newspaper, and in The *Leicester Folk Diary* published online[18].

The 'show' begins shortly after 8.30pm although audience members may continue to arrive up to half an hour later. As 'host band', Sly Old Dogs usually start with an up-tempo arrangement of a well-known song, enabling other musicians to join in if they wish and encouraging the audience to sing along or clap their hands in accompaniment. In addition to the range of instruments played by the core band, visiting musicians bring guitars (the predominant instrument of the evening), banjo, fiddle, flute and recorder while some regulars will also sing unaccompanied when invited. The key is usually simple for most instruments being played in the room, such as G, D or E minor and typical opening songs are traditional with strong choruses, such as *The Man You Don't Meet Every Day* or *The Star of The County Down*, or well-known songs written in a 'folk' style, such as Ewan MacColl's *Dirty Old Town* or Pete St.John's *The Rare Ould Times*.

While the musicians and audience show a broad tolerance of most styles of music that can be performed acoustically, the repertoire throughout the evening tends to comprise well-known folk songs and tunes drawn from the traditions of Ireland or Scotland or arrangements of songs written by contemporary English, American or Australian songwriters. After the opening number, the 'compère' invites other band members to lead with a song or tune set before asking the non-band members to perform. The running order is rarely planned more than one or two songs in advance; the compère's role is to decide the running order and give notice to musicians that they are about to be asked to perform or lead the others in a set of tunes. The expectation shared by musicians and audience is for everyone who has come to perform to be given an equal opportunity to do so, although an unspoken 'rule' is understood that whoever takes on the compère role makes the final choice of who performs when. The musicians and singers usually remain seated when performing although some do stand for their own particular turn. One of the band members

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[18] <http://lfd.org.uk>

even stands in front of the musicians to perform a comic parody of an Irish step-dancing routine incorporated into one of his songs.

The evening is structured into three sets of music, jokingly referred to by the group as 'an evening of three halves'. The two intervals, each usually around 20 minutes in length, provide an opportunity for participants to buy drinks and, hence, a return on the pub owner's 'investment' into the evening – heating and lighting for the room and a free drink for each members of the host band. The compère attempts to begin each 'half' with an appropriately lively song or tune set by the resident group. He will normally announce 'parish notices' at the beginning of the third set: a reminder to the audience of the date of the next session and news of other local events involving members of the band or other musicians in the room. The compère is also responsible for managing the timing of the evening; the music finishes shortly after 11pm when the group performs a song that encourages audience participation; in most cases this is a rendition of the popular folk song *Wild Mountain Thyme*[19] where audience members are invited to sing loudly and with harmonies. A euphoric 'finale' effect is enhanced through the 'community' singing of the last chorus of the song without musical accompaniment, usually followed by enthusiastic applause to signify a sense of occasion shared by all.

Of the three case study clubs for this research, Sly Old Dogs and Friends requires the least planning and little or no overt formal organisational structure. There are no guest acts, no admission charge and no raffle; the only financial activity that may occur will be an occasional 'jug collection' to sponsor a group member or regular visitor embarking on a charity fund-raising activity, or the sale of copies of a home-recorded CD by a band member. Arguably, one of the distinguishing characteristics of the session is the lack of advance planning for which musicians will be attending and what songs or tunes are going to be performed by those that do. For many of the participants, one of the positive features of the evening is its unpredictability; while there are regularly attending musicians, there are also unexpected visitors, some of whom are known on the folk music circuit as

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[19]   Composed by Francis McPeake Snr but based on a Scottish traditional song.

professional or semi-professional artists, taking time out to perform in an amateur environment.

The session's distinctive format seems to 'fill a gap' between the ritualised singarounds commonly hosted by folk clubs and the more apparently spontaneous music sessions, based on the format of traditional Irish sessions that take place in the bars and backrooms of public houses (see Foy 2009). Despite the lack of a formal policy or defined organisational structure, some members of the group are concerned that this distinctiveness is maintained and that the sessions do not become predictable, repetitive or too similar to the 'singaround' format. From my personal longstanding perspective as a participant in the former monthly music sessions hosted by The Oddsods, I have observed a general transformation from the more concert-style performances given by the resident band, with other musicians joining in with the band's own repertoire of lively Irish and Scottish folksongs, to the present-day arrangement in which guest musicians are invited to 'lead' with a song or tune on a more egalitarian, turn-taking basis. While this seems to be popular with musicians and audience, as evidenced by the continuing strong attendance rate by both, it is part of the resident band's role to ensure that most of the material played involves wide participation by musicians and audience, rather than a succession of solo performances. I see it as part of the compère's role to encourage variation and contrast in musical styles and mode of performance; the audience may enjoy sitting and listening to musicians performing their own songs or solo instrumental pieces but also respond well when they are able to participate actively, for example, by clapping their hands in unison in the choruses of the traditional Irish songs *Whiskey in The Jar* and *The Wild Rover*, or singing, sometimes with harmonies, to the choruses of *The Galway Shawl* and *The Black Velvet Band*.

In contrast to the other case study clubs in this research, the routines, repertoires and practices of Sly Old Dogs and Friends have evolved with little consultation or policy decision-making between band members or indeed with audience members. Instead, the format appears to be guided by a form of 'custom and practice' but one that still refers back to the conventions of The Oddsods' sessions and it is not uncommon for reference to this band to be made in conversation between participants or in the introduction of songs by some of Sly

Old Dogs' members. In its 15-year history, The Oddsods had built up a local following a reputation for up-tempo and lively arrangements of popular folk songs and the sessions that they hosted in the Denbigh Arms, Monks Kirby reflected that style of music. Those performances were dominated by the personality of the group's lead singer and melodeon-player, Simon who assumed control of the event through the choice of material and the nomination of guest musicians to perform (this role was taken on by myself when Simon was unavailable). Thus a fairly autocratic approach was adopted for the organisation of the evening in contrast to the more 'democratic' format of Sly Old Dogs and Friends; the event took on more of a concert format than a session, although joining in was still encouraged and guest musicians were referred to as 'The Oddsods Orchestra'.

With the demise of the band, following Simon's departure for health reasons, and the formation of Sly Old Dogs by former members, the resumption of the monthly music sessions, initially in the Denbigh Arms, has drawn on many of the conventions established by The Oddsods events: admission is free; the 'evening of three halves' structure; many of the songs performed by Sly Old Dogs were from The Oddsods' repertoire (although the arrangements have changed in some cases to a gentler and more melodic style); some of the more comedic routines and introductions to songs incorporated into The Oddsods performances have survived; and even the phasing of some of the compère's announcements is very similar to that of key announcements that Simon would make. Recollections of The Oddsods are shared by many of the musicians and some of the audience members attending the current sessions and references to the style and conventions of The Oddsods' performances are hence recognised and understood. Some audience members still possess copies of the two CD albums that The Oddsods released in 1996 and 2000.

Apart from the change of venue, the main distinction between sessions hosted by The Oddsods and those now hosted by Sly Old Dogs is the motivation of the musicians. The Oddsods were a semi-professional band who regarded the monthly sessions as a showcase event and source of offers for paid work from audience members and visitors (often for family occasions or corporate events). While Sly Old Dogs are also paid for occasional public performances, most members of the band either have less time to commit to pursuing

professional bookings or are more committed members of other bands that are active in the area. Their motivation for the monthly sessions are hence more social; for them, it is a night out, playing music with friends in a convivial atmosphere with little or no concern to promote themselves as a 'bookable' band.

Chapter 3.2: Case Study #2 – Warwick Folk Club

A folk club has existed in Warwick since the mid-1970s. In contrast to the rural home-base of Sly Old Dogs and Friends, the club meets in an urban location close to the centre of an English county town. With a population of approximately 24,000[20], Warwick is a popular tourist destination in the English Midlands. It is promoted as a location 'steeped in history' (Warwickshire County Council n.d.) and Warwick Castle is an important attraction for visitors. It is also a relatively prosperous area; Warwick District, which includes the adjoining towns of Leamington Spa, Kenilworth, Whitnash and neighbouring villages, has a population of 137,700 (Office for National Statistics 2013) and the proportion of employed residents in management and professional occupations is considerably higher than the national average. 56.1% of employed people in Warwick District work in senior, managerial, professional or technical positions.[21] This compares with 39.7% for the West Midlands and 43.3% for Great Britain. Main employers in the area include National Grid plc (power supply), Millward Brown (advertising and marketing), Eaton Corporation (industrial power management), International Business Machines (IBM) Corp. (computing systems) and Land Rover (automotive manufacturing).

 The town has also played host to the annual Warwick Folk Festival since 1978; this is now an established event on the British folk calendar attracting 6-8,000 visitors to the town and selling over 20,000 tickets to individual events[22]. However, the festival and the folk club are separate entities, each with its own financial arrangements, team of organisers and policy for the booking of guest acts, self-promotion and operation. The festival, which takes place from the last Thursday to Sunday of the month of July, does accommodate the club by including specially planned 'Folk Club' events as part of its programme and arranging for

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[20] <http://gov-certificates.co.uk/districts/warwick.php>. This has grown slightly since the population recorded in the 2001 census of 23,350:
<http://www.citypopulation.de/php/uk-england-westmidlands.php?adm2id=44>.

[21] These are employment positions areas covered by SOC2010 Major Groups 1-3 in the Standard Occupation Classification. Information from the Office for National Statistics, online:
<https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/la/2038431964/report.aspx#tabempocc>.

[22] Information kindly provided by Dick Dixon, Director of Warwick Folk Festival.

some of the festival guest acts to appear at these at allotted times. It also offers free advertising for the folk club in its published programme. In all other respects, however, the folk club and festival are autonomous.

In its lifetime, Warwick Folk Club has been under the management of different groups and individuals and relocated on several occasions before establishing its current home in the Warwick Arms Hotel in 2008. The hotel is located in a building whose history dates back to the 17th century[23]. The club meets weekly on Monday evenings in a function room on the ground floor of the building. At the time of this research, it was run by a managing group of five friends, all in their 50s and early 60s and including two couples. The longest standing organisers were three local musicians, Brian (who plays violin) and vocal and accordion duo Martin and Val Day. Folk singer, guitarist and former radio broadcaster, Norman Wheatley and his partner Viv joined the team in 2008[24]. The group met regularly to plan the club's programme of guest and feature nights, determine and arrange to book local and national guest acts, manage the club's finances and review its format, promotion and overall operating policy. Norman plays down any implication of undue formality in the organisation of the club:

> The 'committee' is probably the wrong word to use as the organising bunch of a folk club. It sounds a bit too formal and organised. You get too organised and the audience don't like it – 'ooh it's getting a bit too slick you know'. We have the occasional gathering. We take notes because we've got to remember what we said. But we will have a general chat about how we are going, the way forwards, the kind of guests we would want to book, who we've seen and so on. (Norman Wheatley – Warwick Folk Club)[25]

The club's website indicates a degree of ambivalence in its use of the concept of 'folk' and its policy in determining appropriate musical content – or, indeed, its own status as a 'club':

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[23] According to the hotel's website <http://www.warwickarmshotel.com/history.htm>.

[24] Since this research was conducted, Martin and Val Day have left the committee and the club is now run by Norman with a 'front of house team' of three, plus five MCs and 'musical advisors': <http://www.warwickfolkclub.co.uk/theteam.html>.

[25] Statements by Norman Wheatley are taken from a transcribed interview for this research, conducted in Norman's home on 27 October 2011.

‘Folk Club’ isn't really the best way to describe this music venue! Firstly, it's not a club in the sense that you need to be a member: you're more than welcome to come along at any time to listen. There's no membership and there's usually no need for tickets in advance. Secondly, the music that's heard covers much more than the term ‘folk’ might suggest. There have been whole evenings of jazz, blues and pop while traditional tunes and self-penned material, country ballads, standards, and monologues have all been well received. (Warwick Folk Club 2013a)

In keeping with many so-called ‘folk clubs’ throughout the British Isles, the term ‘club’ implies a gathering of people who share a common interest and interact in ways that reflect a relational framework arising from their participation or ‘membership’ of that gathering. In some folk clubs, membership is institutionalised to some degree, usually designed to promote loyalty by offering a benefit of discounted admission and inclusion in a mailing list. Membership may be established automatically (first-time visitors paying admission automatically become ‘members’) or simply by adding one's name to that mailing list. In some instances, membership of a folk club may take the form of share-holding within a formal and rule-driven constitution. For the organisers of Warwick Folk Club, however, the terms ‘club’ and ‘member’ take on more of an expediently figurative meaning; the club has no formal constitution and there is no literal membership scheme. On a week-to-week basis, most audience members attending are people known to the organisers and to each other, often on first name terms:

Some of our audience are very regular. Some come almost religiously – not absolutely – every week. Some like to have their same row of chairs like certain families had their own pews in churches. (Norman Wheatley)

While Norman admits to having conducted no demographic analysis of the club's audience, he does offer a general characterisation of the type of people who attend the club, with many whose lives have been involved in folk music since the 1960s:

They tend to be my age, my contemporaries, mostly I would say. Some are retired but many of them are still in work, as are many of the performers. We have a certain younger contingent as well who seem to be attracted to the club. But people of a certain age got into it because of the folk movement in the 60s and they got swept along with it. (Norman Wheatley)

Despite its lack of an explicit constitution, Warwick Folk Club does proclaim a 'policy' never to book guest acts unless they have been seen performing live by any one of the club's organisers. This policy is announced on the club's website to discourage unsolicited calls from artists (or their agents) seeking bookings:

> We would dearly love to be able to offer bookings to singers and groups we like the sound of and hope that they can hold an audience, interact with them and *perform* in a live situation but sadly you can't get a feel for this from a CD or video. We have a policy of only booking acts who we have seen *live* – at our club, a festival or another venue. We appreciate this makes it difficult to break out of the local area in which you usually perform. Many acts who have taken the trouble to come along and play live … have gone on to get a booking at a later date because people in the audience have said: 'Hey, they're good – you should book them!' (Warwick Folk Club, 2013b)

The wording of this statement is further indication of the club's organisers' efforts to 'play down' any sense of formality, by seeking to avoid the impression of a committee dictum. Through the use of the first person 'we', the organisers seek to address the website visitor in interpersonal terms and the overall conversational rhetoric, in which concerns and responses of the reader are anticipated ('We appreciate this makes it difficult...'), suggests a denial of any authoritarian tone adopted by the club.

In terms of repertoire, 'folk' appears to work as a *portmanteau* term to cover a range of musical styles both within and beyond accepted definitions of the genre and Norman emphasises this eclecticism as a means of catering for wide tastes both within the audience and the organising group itself:

> We always have a variety. Any kind of music goes. I think we can say that rap is the only kind of popular music that we haven't had but everything else we have. … Of the five, there are three of us who tend to the booking of guests. If one person says 'no, I really wouldn't want them', then we wouldn't want to book them. I won't name names but I have said 'fine if you want to book them but I reserve the right not to be there on that night' (Laughs). (Norman Wheatley)

The club's publicity is quite precise and explicit in defining its programme of distinctively formatted events that serve different purposes and set up differing expectations for the audience. The most frequently occurring format is the *Performers' Night*, described on the club's website as 'when we are hosts to anyone who wants to sing, play or even recite!' The arrangement here is very similar to the 'singers' night' format adopted by many folk clubs (including The Tump – see Chapter 3.3), although the Warwick Folk Club organisers like to draw at least a semantic distinction between the two concepts:

> I think the slight drawback of 'singers' night' is that it suggests you can't come along and listen; you can only come along and perform. Performers need people to perform to as well. (Norman Wheatley)

Occurring on average twice a month, 'performers' nights' benefit the club as an organisation by providing a cost-effective evening of entertainment that helps to build up its finances. No payments are made to any guest act but all visitors are charged a nominal £2, including the performers. An additional bonus for the club, as with all folk clubs that host singers' nights, is that it offers a showcase opportunity for local artists trying to establish a name for themselves or visiting artists hoping their short performance will impress organisers enough to offer them a paid guest booking on a future date. Whether or not the organisers are inclined to book such acts, they have at least gained an opportunity to discover which artists are 'on the circuit' and have provided a stage for a variety of performers to entertain their audience, in many cases to a reasonable perceived standard of musicianship.

Once or twice a month, Warwick Folk Club adopts the second and more carefully-planned format of the *Featured Guest Night* in which, according to the club's website, 'top local artists ... play two half hour sets. We also hear other performers who have arranged to play in advance' (Warwick Folk Club 2013a). I shall discuss this format in greater detail in Chapter 4.5.

The club's third format is the *Concert Night*, featuring guest acts described in the website as 'the best contemporary, traditional and comic performers such as Harvey Andrews, Dave Swarbrick and Les Barker' (Warwick Folk Club 2013a). The £8 admission reflects the national standing of the guest act, usually an individual or group with a strong fan base and

reputation within the folk world. The guest performs two extended sets of 45 minutes each. The evening also features a pre-arranged support artist playing one 20-minute 'warm up' set in the first half of the evening.

A variation of the 'performers' night' format is the *theme night*. Structurally this is identical but all performers are encouraged to reflect in their repertoire a common theme for the evening. The theme may refer to the calendar date of the event:

> If you happen to be running a club on a Monday which is also on April 23rd, you can't – well I can't ignore the fact that it's St.George's Day. Let's sing some English songs today rather than anything else that you might sing. Equally we had one this year when it was on the 4th of July which happened to be a Monday so – we sing a lot of American songs anyway – let's make it exclusively American songs. (Norman Wheatley)

Other themes have arisen seemingly from custom and practice within the community of club regulars and have become popular events in the club's annual calendar. These include the 'Non-PC night' and the 'Top 20 night', the former reflecting the club's perceived roots in the traditions of folk singing, the latter reflecting its broad and catholic approach to what constitutes 'folk' music.

Norman Wheatley explains the club's rationale for the 'Non-PC nights' by relating the concept to traditional themes of songs frequently played in folk clubs:

> Half the canon of folk songs are not politically correct , for heaven's sake – fox hunting, whale hunting, having adulterous relationships, gypsy travellers, all these kind of contentious issues. Basically the slogan on that night is – 'If you think you can't get away with it, you can tonight!' It's remarkably popular! (Norman Wheatley)

He describes how he was personally inspired to introduce the 'Top 20' theme night, after realising that three 'number one' chart songs had been performed at the club during one evening:

> One of these was 'On The Trail of the Lonesome Pine' by Laurel and Hardy. Somebody else had previously sung 'She' by Charles Aznavour to concertina accompaniment. Wonderful! Somebody else had done Don McLean's 'Vincent' – lovely folk-ish, contemporary folk, why not? (Norman Wheatley)

In offering a rationale for this theme, Norman evokes a broader notion of 'folk' as 'popular' music:

> Old pop songs have become the folk songs of today. They kind of fulfil the same kind of function. We grew up with them when we were little. Whether you've heard them for years or not, you know the song. You can sing along with them, whether you thought you knew the words or not. They're pretty darn simple. Most folk songs have got probably three chords and they've got easy singable choruses, to the point of banality in some cases. For instance, 'Drift Away', Dobie Grey – not necessarily the world's best known song. We had a guest recently who did that and it made a cracking chorus song – 'Give me the beat boys, free my soul. Want to get lost in your rock'n'roll and drift away'. Fantastic! It's the sign of a great song where if you strip it away from all the production, what you're left with is either just a guitar accompaniment or even sing the song unaccompanied. It's only words and melody and it's still a good song full stop, regardless of the category. (Norman Wheatley)

Common to all three formats of the club is the performance of a designated compère and the inclusion of a raffle draw. While three members of Warwick Folk Club's organising team have often been known to act as master of ceremonies for the evening, the club also invites other figures on the local folk circuit – some regular club visitors, others less so – to appear as guest compère and hence maintain variety in the club's programme of events.

> When you've got a group of reliable, trusted safe hands who know the ropes and will do it regularly, you won't see the same compère twice in any one month. They tend to be local performers, because the compère will start off with a couple of songs usually, get things going, get a nice atmosphere, set the tone, get the audience engaged, get them singing, whatever it takes to create an atmosphere. (Norman Wheatley)

Guest compères, like support acts, receive nominal payment to cover expenses. They are normally booked in advance and planned to be compatible with the featured guest in their musical style and approach. Whoever is booked as compère for the club's 'concert night' is solely responsible for announcing and introducing the acts and does not give any musical performance at all.

Like many other folk clubs, Warwick Folk Club holds a prize raffle draw each evening. The audience is invited to purchase numbered cloakroom tickets from one of the club

organisers, seated at the table by the entrance to the room, and winning numbers are drawn and announced by the compère, assisted by one of the organising team, prior to the final appearance of the guest act or the concluding floor spot in a performers' night. Prizes usually consist of bottles of wine or CD recordings; winners are invited to choose which prize they would prefer. While helping to boost the finances of the club, the raffle also has a structural function of marking the development of the evening and heralding the climax of the final set. Furthermore, it provides an opportunity for banter between club organisers, performers and audience members, for example if one of the regulars wins a prize.

Chapter 3.3: Case Study #3 – The Tump

Named after a local landmark[26], The Tump Folk Club meets every Thursday evening. Its location until recently[27] was the first-floor concert room of The Coombe Social Club, a former working men's club situated on the outskirts of Coventry. The club first met in September 2001 as the White Lion Folk Club, an informal weekly session for singers, musicians and occasional local guests that met in the bar of the White Lion public house in the village of Brinklow in East Warwickshire. The current organiser, Karen, took over the running of this in 2002 and a year later, she relocated the sessions to the British Legion club in the same village where it took on its new identity as 'The Tump Music Club' and ran for five years. On learning that the social club was becoming financially unviable and likely to close, Karen sought out alternative venues and eventually established 'The Tump Folk Music Club' at the Coombe Social Club in July 2008.

The social club was itself established in 1933 in a working community dominated by the nearby Coventry Colliery. It was refurbished during the 1980s and 90s and is now located in a two-tier site with a ground-floor bar and games room and an upstairs concert room which was hired out to the folk club for a weekly fee of £10. The social club's committee agreed that the room should be available weekly to The Tump on the condition that members were granted free access to the folk club. Karen agreed to this reluctantly but found that it was quite rare for social club members to attend. The relationship between the Tump and the social club could be characterised as a 'business agreement' and there was little indication of integration between the two organisations. Folk club visitors would obtain their drinks at the bar but return immediately to the upstairs function room rather than converse with the locals.

Although Karen receives some volunteer help from friends and her parents, she has remained sole organiser of the Tump since 2002. A keen supporter of local folk music, but

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[26] A motte and bailey castle in Brinklow, Warwickshire. Brinklow was the original location for the club.

[27] Observations at The Tump took place in 2009-10 when the club was at this location. It has since moved to The Humber public house, a mile from Coventry city centre.

not a musician or singer herself, she expresses a very strong personal commitment to the club as her own contribution to the Coventry folk circuit:

> This is the only thing I've ever really achieved. This is my baby, you know? It's very important in my life. I think it has boosted my confidence. I'm more the boss here. If anything goes wrong it falls on me. It has been good for me, socially and emotionally, you know. (Karen Orgill – The Tump Folk Club)[28]

When it met at the Coombe, the club itself was small compared with many folk clubs that book guests; audience numbers rarely exceeded 30 and some singaround evenings were attended by as few as ten people. Karen describes her audience as 'not particularly young':

> I suppose the youngest would be in their late 30s up to people approaching their 80s. Since we've moved here – which is nearer to Coventry and on the bus route – we get one or two more people than we had when we were in Brinklow. (Karen Orgill)

While traditional music may be core to the club's repertoire, the range of artists performing at The Tump reflects a somewhat liberal view of what constitutes 'folk' music, although the choice of songs performed relates to the age and musical experience of the audience and regular artists. Contemporary 'pop' songs are not particularly liked but blues and skiffle numbers are popular. One local singer, billed as 'Eddie Jingles' sometimes finishes the evening's entertainment with a lively set of American folk songs, for example *Worried Man Blues* or songs by Woody Guthrie or Pete Seeger, inviting other musicians in the room to accompany him on instruments and vocals. Overall, artists at The Tump perform songs rather than tunes and it is rare for a 'tune set' to break out with musicians joining in with each other.

Karen is able to call on the willing help of several local musicians to assist with the running of any particular night. These include: Rob, a singer, guitarist and harmonica-player who also hosts a neighbouring folk club in the city and often agrees to 'break the ice' by performing as the opening act at guest nights and singers nights; Chris, a semi-professional guitarist and singer who specialises in popular songs from the 1930s to the 1960s plus well-known rock

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[28] Statements by Karen Orgill are taken from a transcribed interview for this research, conducted in the Coombe Social Club, Coventry on 26 February 2010

and roll songs and who frequently steps in to the MC role; and more recently, Justin, a guitarist and singer who often volunteers to supply a PA system for the club and occasionally takes on the role of compère.

Despite low attendance on some nights, the club is regarded as a permanent fixture by musicians and followers on the local folk circuit and Karen is recognised for having built up some expertise as an organiser. As a result she was asked in 2008 to help with the organisation of another weekly folk venue, The Styvechale Folk Club or 'The Sty' which meets in the Green Lane Ex-Services Club on the southern outskirts of the city. She agreed to lend her support when one of the organisers became ill and the club was losing support and in danger of closing down.

> I got involved really in setting up the MySpace page and formalising the evenings – you
> know, guests, local guests and half-hour spots. I don't host The Sty – well I host the
> singarounds but I don't do the guest nights. But I do the timetable of the evening. (Karen
> Orgill)

Similar to Warwick Folk Club, the Tump's programme comprises *singers' nights* and *guest nights* although its most frequent event is its *singaround*, described on the club's Facebook page as 'one of our most popular features':

> This is where experienced performers and novices alike sing a couple of songs (or play a
> couple of tunes or read a poem) at a time and then we move on to the next performer. We
> don't use the stage area or a PA on these nights, we sit in a large circle and just go around
> the circle so that everyone gets a turn. Depending on how many turn up determines how
> many times we go round.

I shall discuss the Tump's singaround format in further detail in Chapter 4.5.

Unlike singarounds, performances for singers' nights take place on a raised stage, with floor artists introduced by Rob, Justin or another invited local musician. Each floor act usually plays two or three songs or tunes each, depending on numbers of performers and time available. The club does attempt to accommodate all musicians who turn up to perform. Guest nights are staged once or twice a month. Similar to Warwick Folk Club, The Tump also books a local performer to act as guest compère and play a support set, while the main guest artist performs two sets of 40 to 45 minutes duration. Some guest acts are local solo

performers or groups (although the club has also featured a team of Appalachian dancers and a group that performs Mummers plays); others enjoy a national reputation or are international visitors touring the UK. In most cases, they appear for a negotiated fee or a percentage of door takings. Common to all nights is what Karen refers to as 'the obligatory raffle', where tickets sold during the interval are drawn for prizes. These vary from bottles of supermarket wine to boxes of chocolates, packs of biscuits or 'novelty' prizes, such as bottles of shampoo or jars of a proprietary brand of yeast extract.

While Karen refers to the club, as an organisation, in the plural form ('we'), she takes on sole responsibility for the decisions concerning guests, formats, promotion, finances and negotiation with the host venue. She has not established any formal policy for running the club but bases her decisions mainly on her own experience and trial and error:

> I've kind of made it up as I've gone along – I didn't have it handed over like 'here's a folk club'. I've picked up pieces that I've liked from other clubs – and taken into account things that I haven't liked – and tried to run the club in the best way I can. (Karen Orgill)

To advertise club events, Karen relies on the Facebook social networking site where the club has its own page and posts 'event' announcements in which 'friends' of the page are invited. Karen and other club regulars take photographs during club nights of participants either performing or relaxing, and these are regularly posted on the club's Facebook page. The club does have a MySpace account but the site has become dormant with profile text that refers visitors to the Facebook page. Karen also sends texts to her personal contacts to announce forthcoming events at the club. The club receives occasional exposure through local press and radio, usually as a result of Karen's personal contacts in these areas; she never issues formal press releases or formal media invitations.

The club has no link with any formal or informal support network within the national folk circuit and Karen does not read any folk publications such as *Folk Roots* or *Living Tradition*, relying more on word-of-mouth news from contacts and past guests or articles spotted online to pick up information on which acts may be worth booking as guests. She does interact with other organisers of local folk events by supporting their clubs and allowing them to be promoted through flyers and posters displayed at her own venue.

Karen's motivation for running The Tump appears to be more social than dedication to the promotion of folk music as a genre or institution:

> We're not strictly folk; we've had some blues acts but what's important is the audience enjoying what I've brought in for them. (Karen Orgill)

The club's singaround nights have become established as a gathering of friends and aspiring musicians, seeking to perform and share music in a non-threatening environment. Karen is ready to admit that the quality of performances can sometimes be poor but the social aspect takes precedence:

> It's a happy band of friends now. We have a laugh and enjoy listening to some good local musicians and some not-so-good local musicians (laughs). I didn't understand at first but when you get to know people and know how much they love the music and what it means to them, and the fact that they're getting on and playing, it's all good. They become your team and you want them to do well. It's the camaraderie I think. (Karen Orgill)

Chapter 3.4: Case study rationale – frameworks for social and symbolic interaction

A comparative analysis of each of the three case study clubs enables me to map out a structure of meaningful interaction between participants: practices which may be routine or ritualistic for each folk club but which may serve as definers of roles and frameworks of signification for musicians and audience members. By considering their practices, actions and dialogue as social 'performance' – above and beyond the 'performances' of songs and tunes by the musicians themselves – this initial analysis draws on the well-established sociological metaphor of 'the world as a stage', associated with Erving Goffman's (1959) use of a dramaturgical framework in the study of social behaviour and drawing from the symbolic interactionist approach pioneered by George Herbert Mead (1934) and developed by Herbert Blumer (1969) and Harold Garfinkel (1967). However, the intention behind my case study analysis is not solely to offer a characterisation of role-playing, or in Goffman's terms, self-*presentation* within a social situation, but to establish and define the overall *performance* as a 'text' which may function as a basis for a critical understanding of amateur music making and sharing as a form of discourse.

An approach based on symbolic interactionism facilitates an understanding of 'text' as a shared set of understandings by participants within a social situation, one which constructs not only a purpose for that situation – to play music – but also a focus for identity and experience based in particular on the cultural conventions of performance, reception and taking part. Thus, in spite of the concepts of 'role' and 'setting' as figurative devices to enable such analysis, it is insufficient to regard the 'text' as a synonym for anything as deterministic as a 'script'. The actions and responses of participants are not outcomes of prescribed roles; they are not so predictable nor are they externally authored.

Nevertheless, the text, by its nature, is still a product of human practice driven by, and embedded within, discourse. Indeed, a number of discourses may be identified as external to the event, as contexts which intersect each other to provide specific understandings or modes of experience for participants. Inevitably these discourses impose an ideological slant on the moment of music making, reflecting differentiated degrees of power associated with

prevailing ideas on how the cultural practice of amateur 'musicking' is experienced and understood.

This chapter has already indicated that the individual clubs selected for this study manifest their own idiosyncratic styles and modes of practice, creating in effect their own specific identities which may be conceived within the terms of promotional discourse as brands. Nevertheless, the brief characterisation provided so far also offers evidence of concepts and practices drawn from a range of discourses that are shared, external and universal. These include the conventions of performance, the repertoire of 'folk', the routine sequence of events (two or three 'halves', interval, raffle, 'parish notices', and so on) and a tension between egalitarianism (manifested through *bourgeois politesse* conventions of fairness, tolerance and turn-taking) and a hierarchical 'star system' that differentiates between guest acts, support acts and floor singers. In addition, factors such as the notion of tradition, the rejection of commercialism and, when money does change hands, and the motivation to 'break even' as opposed to the maximisation of profit, add to the complex array of ideas and values which combine to shape the experience of amateur music-making as a social and cultural event.

By characterising the outcomes of amateur music-making and sharing at the case study clubs as 'texts', I have the means of interpreting the interactions of participants as indicators of sets of meanings, shared by those participants and products of discursive practices. As I discuss in chapter 2 (in particular, pages 83-7), it is possible to examine these meanings in some detail within the framework of symbolic interactionism and to consider how the sharing of these meanings reinforces the perceived roles and identities by participants. In chapter 4, I attempt to achieve this by identifying a range of 'objects' that give the amateur music-making event its particular character and considering their significance as 'object-signs' within amateur music discourse.

Factors determining case study choices.

Observation of the three folk clubs described in this chapter has produced a rich vein of information enabling productive analysis of social practices based on the sharing of amateur music and the contexts in which these occur. On pages 94-7, I discuss the methodological issues of case study analysis and the value for this research of fieldwork observation (and participant observation), and it is appropriate at this point to reflect on the factors that resulted on the choice of these particular clubs. These factors may be considered under two broad headings: *typicality* and *expediency*.

It would be clearly untenable to claim that any one folk club is 'typical' or 'average' of all folk clubs; this would imply the existence of an idealised format for such an establishment perceived as a reference point for any single club. It is true that numerous publications are in circulation advising how a folk club *should* be organised (see page 47), but even these indicate differences of emphasis and perspective, for example of the audience or the guest performer. In practice, however, each club could be seen as a product of its own idiosyncractic history, location and set of motivations and personalities of the people involved in it. Hence, the term 'typicality' refers less to the extent that clubs comply with a given template of format and structure and more to the extent that they are perceived and recognised as 'folk clubs' – or their difference from venues that are not 'folk' clubs.

A slightly complicating factor here – as indicated in Chapter 1's discussion on definitions – is that of nomenclature. Not all music-making events, where folk music is played and which are perceived as part of the 'folk scene', call themselves 'folk' clubs. Indeed, one of the case studies selected here – Sly Old Dogs and Friends – takes its name from its resident band rather the type of music usually performed there. Participants often use the shorthand term 'session' to describe it. Another case study, The Tump, has only recently presented itself as 'The Tump Folk Music Club' and was known originally as 'The Tump Music Club'. In both cases, their categorisation as 'folk clubs' is useful in that it enables them to be identified as such in the local media and events listings and to target their promotional material at a perceived community of folk fans. The term 'folk' only becomes problematic if it is perceived as limiting the scope of music performed: a situation that all of the clubs under

scrutiny explicitly seek to avoid. Indeed, as has already been established in Chapter 3.2, organisers of Warwick Folk Club, which does embrace the term within its title, are keen to emphasise the broad range of music performed, reflecting an understanding of 'folk' that some more purist folk fans may regard as eclectic to the extreme.

Possibly, a 'typical' selection of case studies for this research might have been made on the basis of the music performed: pure folk, a broad 'anything goes' policy and something in between. However, such an approach would not only imply, misleadingly, that it is possible to apply some form of rigorous system of classification to produce an objective sample or cross-section of folk clubs, but would also distract from the central focus of this research: music-making as a social practice rather than the 'folk scene' as a cultural institution or community. Arguably, the fact that all three case studies do allow for a broad interpretation of what constitutes 'folk music' makes them more interesting as locations for this research as none of them are based on a stated or primary motivation to preserve folk music or further the cause for the folk movement. Their main function, as indicated in the responses of organisers, is to entertain and provide a social and socialising experience. Indications of any institutionalised 'folk' discourse, reflecting notions of maintaining tradition of reinforcing a folk 'genre' – and its associated repertoire and mode of performance – could thus be construed as evidence of an external ideological framework that shapes and seeks to impose meaning on the event.

It is simpler at this stage to make a case for the selection of these clubs on the basis that they are *a-typical*, at least when considered in contrast with each other. They do share a number of common features – geography (they are all located within a radius of twenty miles), personalities (the organisers know each other and many of the performers and some audience members visit two or all three of the venues) and repertoire (material performed at any one venue would 'fit in' with the repertoires of the others). But they are also distinctive, especially in their modes of organisation and the type of social experience that they provide. For example, this chapter has indicated how Warwick Folk Club is run by a committee and is significantly policy-orientated, while The Tump is based on a more autocratic arrangement of one organiser applying her experience and intuition and Sly Old Dogs and Friends reflects a more evolutionary approach of custom and practice. These

points of difference therefore indicate a potential for productive analysis, partly through contrast and comparison.

This potential makes the selection of these case studies an *expedient* choice. Not only are they easily accessible to me as a researcher and participant, they also appear to function effectively as locations for distinctive and analysable forms of social interaction, which would make it relatively straightforward to identify and characterise practices of amateur music-making as a discourse. It was therefore apparent from the outset that the study of music events staged further away would be unlikely to produce additional insights into these practices.

A further consideration related to the expediency factor – and one that raises issues about my position as a researcher – is the fact that I am already familiar with these venues. I have visited two of them, The Tump and Warwick Folk Club, fairly regularly over the last ten years and have even appeared at both in band line-ups that have been booked to appear as the main guest act (see pages 186-90). I have already established my own central role as part of the host band for Sly Old Dogs and Friends and as 'master of ceremonies' for most of the sessions that take place under that name. Obviously, then, my characterisation and analysis of all three clubs is based on the cumulative long-term experience of personal involvement, not only with the clubs themselves but as part of the overall 'folk scene' of Coventry and Warwickshire. This has significant consequences for my role as a researcher and the level of authority I may claim for the interpretations that I offer of the music-making practices under scrutiny. Chapters 2.2 and 2.3 include discussion on the role and validity of ethnographic method, especially participant observation, when applied to the study of music-making as a cultural practice and the extent to which this may be affected by the relationship between the researcher and the participants being observed. In the analysis that follows, the benefit of 'inside knowledge' as a basis for interpretation should be apparent as a means of recognising and accounting for value systems and historical knowledges held and shared by participants, factors which may not be so readily accessible to the 'neutral' observer operating within a paradigm of objectivity.

Chapter 4 – The Analysis (part 1): Meaningful territory for intersubjectivity

Chapter 4.1: Engagement with a world of 'objects' – some conceptual issues

Having mapped out and rationalised the selection of case studies, we now reach the first stage of analysis. In dramaturgical terms, this attempts to define the 'stage' or terrain within which interaction occurs between amateur musicians and their associates. But rather than treat this as physical or geographical territory, any attempt to characterise music-making as discursive practice calls for an understanding of the folk club as a meaningful domain, a complex sign-system of *objects* that make up the temporary 'world' of the amateur musician. It is within this world that a particular set of meanings and associations come into play, meanings which appear to be intrinsic but are specific to the moment of amateur music-making. While this stage of the analysis is central to my thesis that amateur music discourse is best conceptualised as an intersubjectively-based phenomenon, it is important to acknowledge the impact of discursive frameworks that participants bring into the domain, reflecting interests and priorities of external and contextual agencies and cultural practices. These will be addressed in the second stage of my analysis in Chapter 5.

Robert Prus defines 'object' (in a footnote) as 'any item, thing, distinction, concept, behavior, or image to which people may refer (i.e., become aware of, attend to, point to, acknowledge, consider, discuss or otherwise act toward)' (Prus 1996, p.30). As objects are referred to by participants of an event, in a way that makes that event meaningful to them, they may be understood for the purposes of analysis as *object-signs*. Following Prus's definition, we can establish a distinction between this concept and the items or 'props' that have a physical presence in the room of the folk club. Physical objects are important parts of the setting or environment in which interaction occurs – for example, furniture that is arranged to establish the proximity of interlocutors, or the positioning of music stands and musical instruments to stake out a 'performance' area. However, object-signs also alert us to abstract referents that are still integral to the domain or environment inhabited by – and understood by – participants in amateur music-making events. For example, they may refer

us to actions (such as specific musical performances), participant roles or more general practices associated with music-making, such as singing or playing within the conventions of a known generic style, showing appreciation for a performance, or in other ways observing tacitly agreed codes of behaviour. The act by participants of sharing the sets of meaning associated with object-signs effectively reinforces the persona, or sense of 'self', acquired by each participant and inscribed within the role that he or she performs within that specific environment, thus establishing a conceptual link between objects and identity within the domain of amateur music-making.

The object-signs identified and analysed here constitute the fabric of this domain. Their presence seems to reaffirm the expectations of roles, practices and interactive behaviours shared by participants. At a basic level, they function as symbols on a map or constituent elements of a code and hence offer an opportunity to conceptualise the music-making event as a 'text'. What is important to emphasise here is that this analysis, even at this initial stage, is one founded on the concept of *intersubjectivity*. Within philosophical discourse, this concept formed the basis of Edmund Husserl's (1960) consideration of the relationship between the perceiving 'self' and the apparently objective reality of the world inhabited by the self; intersubjective experience is based on the assumption that the world as 'I' perceive it, is the same as the world perceived by you and our ability to interact depends upon this shared perception of our environment. This position is summarised by Matheson Russell:

> 'Intersubjectivity' or 'intersubjective experience' is that manner of experiencing the world in which one's experience is mediated by an awareness of others' experience of the same. Intersubjectivity, in this sense, is not equivalent to the experience *of* other conscious beings *per se*. Instead, it is the manner of experiencing made possible by already possessing a sense of 'being *with* other conscious beings'. (Russell 2006 pp.163-4)

This is key to the symbolic interactionist perspective, as objects are the focus of meaning that participants attach when they form part of a social, interactive and intersubjective situation. With Saussurian shades of structural linguistics, Prus refers us to Mead's (1934, p.78) assertion that objects are not inherently endowed with meaning by stating that *'people bring [objects] into existence by the ways in which they attend to, distinguish, define, and act toward these [experiential essences]'* (Prus 1996, pp.11-2 – author's italics).

This practice of defining and delineating objects through social practice is itself nuanced. Prus demonstrates the significance of intersubjectivity in the study of human interactive behaviour when he comments on Herbert Blumer's studies of the relationship between people's backgrounds and their perceptual constructions of reality:

> It is, as Blumer (1969) so cogently argues, a fundamental error to view people as mediums through which various structures may find expression. *People not only think, anticipate, act, interact, assess and adjust but they do so by invoking intersubjectively derived languages and they operate most fundamentally within intersubjectively sustained symbolic realities*. (Prus 1969, p.13 – author's italics)

Blumer does recognise and acknowledge the 'obdurate character' (Blumer 1969, p.22) of the empirical world which may impinge on people's interpretation and construction of reality. But it does not impose an irresistible construction, immune to any form of negotiation. Adherence to this argument demonstrates Blumer's philosophical reliance on John Dewey's critique of what he termed as 'spectator theory' of knowledge (Dewey 1929, p.23) and Dewey's insistence that the world cannot be understood as comprising objects independent of human perception and that humans cannot be understood outside the context of their environment. Blumer himself makes explicit reference to Mead's pragmatic stance on how sociology should engage with the concept of the real (see Morrione 2003, xii) and offers a direct response to the philosophical debate on the subject's perception or construction of the 'real world' through pragmatism rather than solipsism: 'the empirical world of our discipline is the natural social world of everyday experience' (Blumer 1969, p.148).

Thus, Blumer's focus as a social scientist is very much on the dynamism between the person and the environment. While 'obdurate reality' can be conceived of as existing beyond, and independent of, human perception, it is the dynamic social action of meaning-making – indeed the conscious processes of thought and of 'making sense' of the world – that points to a more authoritative understanding of that person's role and identity. Hence, in the context of this research, reference to the music-making event as a 'text' may offer a starting point for productive critical discourse analysis but it would be inappropriate to conceive of

the event as a 'collection' of external objects, each a constituent of an 'out-there' reality, each ascribed with a fixed meaning.

Following Blumer's formulations of how the 'self' interrelates with the *social* environment, it is evident that the meaning-making process says as much about the ways in which participants see themselves – the roles and personas that they take on – as it does about the specific significance of objects that make up that environment. The participants themselves, the roles that they inhabit and the 'fronts' (Goffman 1959, p.22) they present are essential to that environment as a *social* phenomenon and their perception of – and performance within – that domain transforms it, in sociological terms, into a 'community'. The concept of intersubjectivity reminds us that meanings shared within the community contribute towards the participants' own definition of their role and identity. Robert Prus concludes from this:

> *Humans derive their (social) essences from the communities in which they are located, and human communities are contingent on the development of shared (or intersubjectively acknowledged) symbols or languages.* This means that there can be no self without the (community) other. (Prus 1996, p.10 – author's italics)

and further expands on this point:

> Like many other biological life-forms, people can 'learn' things through conditioning effects, but without achieving a sense of intersubjectivity, without tapping into the viewpoint of the other, there would be no meaningful notion of mind, self, reflectivity, thinking, imagining, anticipating, strategizing, assessing, or creating. (Prus 1997, p.6)

If we are to adopt a symbolic interactionist perspective as a means of understanding the social essence of amateur music-making, the concept of intersubjectivity is clearly crucial. Not only are we concerned with how protagonists in a social situation make use of symbols to establish and share meanings to make sense of the world, we also need to take particular account of how a sense of *social* reality is 'negotiated' between participants. The emphasis is on 'social'; to understand and fully participate in that world, people need to develop, negotiate and construct an understanding of their relationships with each other. Their own individuality, their identity, their role is as much defined by that world as that world is defined by them.

This requires recognition of 'text' as a dynamic and multi-layered concept which is capable of providing a foundation for understanding the ways in which music-making is shaped by discourse. The subjectively experienced life-world or community of the folk club is one which may be characterised by a particular configuration of object-signs, which take on meanings for those who participate within that community, and as such we can establish the 'text' as a set of shared and negotiated rules of signification, rather than an output *per se*, even though we need to look firstly at that output, to deconstruct it, in order to gain an understanding of the dynamics of the text.   More realistically, the text maps out the domain in which a set of identifiable discourses intersect and compete for dominance in defining the cultural experience of music-making as a social activity.

I wish to establish one further caveat before attempting to identify and analyse the object-signs that make up the text. The act of making sense of an environment, constituted by such signs, is not an impersonal practice of meaning-attribution. This point is especially relevant when that environment is one in which music is produced, shared and enjoyed. To refer to a somewhat contrived term often used by social scientists, such an analysis cannot reach authoritative conclusions without taking into account the dimension of 'emotionality' (see Prus 1996, pp.173-201). Music-making is essentially an affective experience, which may involve catharsis, nostalgia, empathy and emotive bonding between performer and listener, invoking a production of meanings through rhetoric and, not infrequently, a physiological response through laughter, tears and feelings of euphoria, sentimentality, anger or sadness. Object-signs may provide the 'props' for the life-world of the folk club, but in doing so, they also provide the setting within which such affective and emotive responses are able to take form.

Chapter 4.2: Object-signs of folk clubs – establishing categories

For the analytical purposes of establishing a set of amateur music-making practices as a 'text', within the context of folk clubs and folk music sessions, I shall attempt here to identify a reasonably comprehensive range of object-signs that embody particular meanings for those who participate in such events. These object-signs are intrinsic not only to the 'life-world' of the folk club but also to the identity of participants through their engagement with each other and their intersubjective relationships with and through these objects, enabling them to 'perform' appropriately to the occasion. For the sake of organisational expediency, I establish working categories for such object-signs and then attempt a detailed mapping of their significance from the perspective of participants throughout the rest of this chapter.

The five categories that I have identified are:
- *people, hierarchies and role relationships*
- *physical objects*
- *event formats*
- *repertoires, performance styles and practices*
- *economic relationships.*

From the outset, it is evident from the case study observations (and indeed from my own forty years of experience as a folk club visitor and performer) that participants, the role sets that they occupy and the positions they assume within a social hierarchy, may themselves be regarded as object-signs. Their presence – as individuals and, primarily, as performers of roles ascribed to them within this setting, roles that are recognised and understood collectively by fellow participants – is essential to the nature of the music-making event itself. Therefore it is useful to establish a category of object-signs under the heading of *people, hierarchies and role relationships*. Within this category, roles are recognised through a set of expectations, shared and understood by participants, of how they should be fulfilled, what forms of interaction should take place and what level of contribution is made by role occupants to the smooth running of the event. Such roles in folk clubs may include: floor singer, guest act, local guest, support act, audience member, MC or compère, sound

engineer, volunteer or 'helper' (e.g. regular visitor who sells raffle tickets), and club organiser. Other roles may be less intrinsic but still associated with the event: bar staff, pub landlord, and, in the case of The Tump, regular customers or members of the host venue who are accorded entitlement to attend the club night.

Having established people as meaningful 'objects' in this analysis, it clearly follows that a category is needed for *physical objects* (or from a dramaturgical viewpoint, inanimate 'props') which take on specific connotations within the context of the formalised amateur music event. This category would include those props brought in by participants for the purposes of the event itself; obviously musical instruments (although as object-signs, different instruments carry particular associations or meanings, by dint of their design, quality of manufacture, rarity value and cultural associations), plus paraphernalia associated with musical performance (for example music stands, implements for performance, electronic tuners, fingerpicks, flat picks, capos, instrument cases, crib sheets, set lists), promotional materials (such as personally recorded CDs for sale, leaflets, business cards) and personal props, including items of apparel, badges, or items intrinsic to the performance of specific songs. Others may be brought in by organisers to establish a particular mode of experience and interaction during the music-making event. These may include a public address system with microphones, stands and cables, stage lighting equipment, notice boards with notices (an important prop for Warwick Folk Club – see page 166), or smaller items to personalise or add character to the event such as candles, tea-light candles, electronic candles, glass candle-holders, a table cloth or posters. Props brought into the domain may have specific organisation or economic functions for the event, such as raffle prizes, raffle tickets or merchandising material. Some may be prepared specially for the event by organisers: instruction and information notices, a 'signing-in' list for floor singers, a collection tin or 'jug', flyers, handouts, advance tickets, etc. Equally significant to the specificity of the amateur music event are those objects which may already belong to the pub, club or hosting venue but are physically relocated or manipulated by the folk club organisers or helpers to establish specific patterns of interaction: furniture, stage blocks, and so on.

Items for personal consumption also play a vital role in the forms of socialisation and the nature of interaction between participants. A longstanding and traditional 'object' traditionally associated with folk clubs is alcoholic drink, in particular beer, important not only for its social implications but also for the structuring of the event itself (intervals or 'beer breaks' – see Hield 2010, pp.96 and 101) and the economic base of the relationship between the club and the host venue. Free drinks for regular musicians constitute a 'currency' in the arrangement between Sly Old Dogs and their host venue (see page 92). The Warwick Arms Hotel allows free access to its function room for the Warwick Folk Club on the basis that this will enhance bar sales. The presence of alcoholic drinks in the location for the event further signifies a level of informality underpinning the interaction. Unlike most theatre concerts, drinks may be consumed by audience members and performers throughout the evening and are not confined to a bar area during a specific time period. Nevertheless, the social mores of the folk club specify forms of social etiquette related to the purchase and consumption of drinks to ensure that musical performances are not disrupted by noise from the bar or raucous, alcohol-related behaviour by participants – even though such behaviour does occur on occasion, calling for polite restorative action by club organisers or venue staff.

Two categories of object-sign identified here relate to varying forms of social practice associated with amateur music-making events and the sanctioned or expected modes of behaviour at folk clubs or music sessions. One of these highlights associations and meanings shared by participants to named structural forms of event, or *event formats*. These are usually indicated through promotional announcements and literature and create expectations for the knowledgeable audience of the event's structure and mode of organisation: 'concert night', 'guest night', 'singers night', 'theme night', 'party night', 'come all ye', 'singaround', 'music session', 'jam session', 'open mic session' – these are examples of terminology to differentiate specific formats. Each format is further characterised by organisational and behavioural practices that may be common to different formats but are arranged in quite specific ways: set, spot, extended spot, feature spot, floor spot, guest spot, support spot, first half, second half, interval, announcements or 'parish notices', raffle draw, and so on.

The other category of social practice as object-sign refers to *repertoires, performance styles and practices* which includes performance practices exhibited by musicians and audiences to reinforce and signify their active and willing participation in the event. This category also focuses on those concepts which form a structural organisation of the types of music that are usually played at folk clubs. As object-signs, these concepts fulfil a dual purpose in establishing rules, expectations and reference points for participants' readings of – and appreciation of – individual performance pieces, and in mapping out a broader territory of styles that are customary to a 'folk' event and, indeed, acceptable to participants of a folk club or music session.

My final category of object-signs – e*conomic relationships* – refers to the economic basis on which the amateur music event is organised. Here I discuss the potential incongruity of an *amateur* music event that charges for admission and applies promotional techniques to maximise income and reduce expenditure. Many folk clubs promote themselves as 'non-profit making' organisations and the organisers of two of the case study clubs for this research express contentment that they 'break even' over a period of time. Even when no admission is charged and no expenditure is necessary – as is the case for Sly Old Dogs and Friends – the notion of 'value for money' often forms part of the perception by participants, taking into account expenditure on drinks, purchases of CDs recorded by participating musicians, or contributions to voluntary charity collections that occasionally take place at this event. Common to all three case studies is the construction of an event that is driven more by community and social interests than by financial or business concerns. Terms like 'the market', 'customers', 'consumers' and 'commodities' are notably absent or down-played, although, as I discuss in chapter 4.7, 'value for money' is more frequently cited as a concern for club organisers and paying audiences for guest nights.

Those economic concepts which do, for this analysis, function as object-signs through their contribution to the 'life-world' of the music-making event, relate more to the necessary practice of money changing hands rather than to the club as a commercially-run operation. Thus 'door' not only refers to the physical environment, the point where 'outer' noise may disturb the 'inner' environment, but also serves as a metonym as the location within that environment where admission is charged. 'Takings' is often a more favoured term than the

more businesslike 'income' when referring to payments at the door, voluntary contributions to the 'jug' that is passed round at some folk events, or the purchase of raffle tickets. While guests may be paid a set, pre-agreed 'fee', local guest acts or guest compères are often paid 'expenses', as emphasis that payment is made as compensation rather than evaluation of their intrinsic worth as performers. Not unusually, the agreed 'fee' between a folk club and guest may be based on a minimum plus percentage, calculated from the total door takings for the evening.

Chapter 4.3: People, hierarchies and role relationships

There now follows a deeper examination of object-signs at folk clubs. The focus of analysis is selective, partly for expediency and partly to avoid labouring the overall purpose of this exercise: to characterise the domain or territory within which amateur music-making takes place as a 'text' capable of producing shared meanings for participants and provide an intersubjective basis for a shared sense of identity and 'belonging' to that domain.

Having established the principle that identification of object-signs provides insight into the experience of being a member of that community, it is clearly a worthwhile starting point for this more detailed analysis to consider participants themselves – the performers in the dramaturgical scenario – as bearers of meaning for each other through their roles and positions within social and organisational hierarchies. Hence this section describes and critiques instances of normative social behaviour practised by performers and audience members at music events and the role relationships indicated by their actions.

The approach that I adopt here bears comparison with Smith's study of the Glebe Music Club, Sunderland (1987) which reflects the ethogenic approach pioneered by Rom Harré (1979, 1983). This is a response to methodological issues in social psychology, arising from the interpretation of social interaction and behaviour, and posits that such interaction, specifically conversation, enables human beings to derive a sense of a unified self. Ethogenics present a 'duality between person and self' (Smith 1987, p.168) in which the 'self' organises a person's experience as a social being and is realised through the 'public-collective talk' that characterises a linguistic community. Smith quotes from Harré (1983):

> It (the self) is a theoretical concept whose source analogue is the socially defined and sustained concept of 'person' that is favoured in the society under study and is embodied in the grammatical forms of public speech appropriate to talk about persons. (Harré 1983, p.26, cited in Smith 1987, p.168)

Smith's contention is that an evening at a folk club lends itself to such analysis as it is possible to draw conclusions from this type of social situation on the presence of rules and roles that define interactive behaviour. In his analysis, it is possible to identify how

individuals are perceived (and perceive themselves) within a socially shared role set (such as 'performer', 'novice performer', 'audience member', 'regular', 'heckler', 'MC', etc.); this is achieved by drawing on a symbolic interactionist perspective and, in this respect, Smith refers specifically to Erving Goffman's dramaturgical model (Goffman 1959). My own analysis of roles as bearers of meaning shared by participants develops this further to indicate broader social precepts which would justify a characterisation of these as practices of a community discourse.   Of those roles listed in chapter 4.2. I have selected two which exemplify the symbolic interactionist perspective as a means of interpreting and understanding the experience of amateur music-making in a semi-formal social setting. These are: *the floor singer* and *the audience member*.

The floor singer

Floor spots occupy a central – and sometimes contentious – position in folk club culture. The practice of floor singing was described by the former Folk Roots (now fRoots) magazine as 'a system unique to British-style folk clubs whereby unpaid local performers get the chance to sing in public for pleasure, to learn their skills in front of an audience [which] has maybe turned out for a famous professional' (Harley 1998, cited in Currie 2000). MacKinnon also describes the folk club 'formula of two halves', each half featuring a guest act and floor spots, as 'a phenomenon which the British folk scene had created for itself' (MacKinnon 1993, p.94). My own observation indicates that floor singing is no longer unique to folk venues and also occurs frequently in acoustic and 'open mic' music events in British public houses which are not promoted or labelled as 'folk clubs'.

Nevertheless, the origins of floor singing can be traced back to the emergence of British folk clubs in the 1950s when, according to Brocken (2003, p.35), it referred mainly to unaccompanied singing performances by audience members. The practice quickly developed to encompass all forms of performance, vocal or instrumental, and the term 'floor *singer*' is now more broadly applied to singers and musicians with a variety of motives. They may be regulars of a particular club or frequent visitors to a number of venues in the area performing for personal enjoyment or to contribute to the community atmosphere of

the event. Others may be semi-professional musicians, visiting a club in the hope of obtaining a paid booking, or touring clubs in a region to promote and sell CD recordings. Floor singers were often motivated by the custom of many folk clubs not to charge admission for performers although this is now increasingly unusual with many clubs charging the same admission to floor singers as they do to all audience members. For singarounds and singers' nights, the admission price is usually cheap and regular floor singers perform and pay in the spirit of supporting the club's financial viability.

Many folk club organisers embrace the concept of floor singing as an opportunity to present new and emerging talent and hence serve to provide the folk scene with a means of constant self-renewal. This does, to some degree, epitomise folk music discourse as contrary to mainstream or popular conceptions of music performance as a planned and rehearsed presentation to receptive audiences by artistes renowned for their specialist skills and creative essence. Instead, the practice of floor singing is a demonstration of folk as a form of music whose roots are self-consciously embedded in the cultures of everyday people, blurring the boundary between performer and audience simply by allowing space for audience members to perform. This point is alluded to by Hield in her discussion on the role of professionalism in folk music:

> ...interaction between professionals and amateurs is widespread and arguably an integral aspect of the folk scene. The involvement of amateurs alongside professionals is twofold both in terms of placing amateurs on stage as floor spots before a professional act and in the way professionals engage in social music making alongside amateur musicians outside of their paid performance roles. (Hield 2010, p.119)

Established folk clubs and music sessions can provide territory in which amateur and professional musicians interact both musically and socially as individuals sharing a bond of membership of a folk community. However, it is the perceived distinction between 'professional' and 'amateur' music performance that also highlights the practice of floor singing as a source of tension among folk club participants, through its potential conflict between two priorities. The first of these is the role of folk clubs to provide a performance space for the amateur musician, the audience member, the novice performer seeking confidence and experience within a supportive community; the second is a role more closely

attuned to discourses of commercialism and promotion, to entertain a paying audience, to provide 'value for money', in essence to commodify the experience of listening to folk music.

For the most part, these positions provided the basis of differentiation between two perspectives indicated by respondents to my social media survey. One viewpoint appeared to celebrate the opportunities afforded by folk clubs to allow space for new raw talent and for amateur musicians seeking to share their music, while the other considered the poor quality and lack of professionalism of some floor artists to be detrimental to the public image of folk music overall. Statements aligned to the first position included:

> Quality of music is important, but I do feel that folk clubs should be open to letting new talent have an airing (providing there is talent evident). (Facebook Survey 1)

> What is a folk club? Is it one where people sit quietly and listen to a talented performer, or one where like minded musicians get together to play music with each other and inspire and challenge each other? I've been to both - and sometimes it's been at the same venue, on the same evening. (Facebook Survey 1)

These typified responses which placed the folk club's role in showcasing and inspiring new talent on a par with providing an evening of entertainment. Other respondents regarded the role of folk clubs in providing a supportive environment and community for amateur musicians to be as important as the quality of music performed. For example:

> Surely the folk club is the place most people start out performing in public, well in my experience anyway. The thing I enjoy about folk clubs most of all is the community, the social aspect of meeting like-minded people and sharing knowledge. The list of successful professionals who come through folk clubs almost as an apprenticeship is endless. Folk clubs (good ones) have a very supportive, friendly approach to amateur performers. The standard of music is of course important, but not the first consideration. Most clubs I have visited have a pretty eclectic mix of musicians of varying levels of 'quality'. Some people take the whole thing far too seriously in my view. (Facebook Survey 1)

A similar point was expressed by a respondent who is a regular floor singer at different clubs:

> I go to Folk Clubs for the music, not always the quality but the varied quantities. Most clubs welcome newcomers and encourage them to have a go. I go to many venues (...) to try out my new material and to interact with the people who frequent the clubs. I must however point out that I have visited a very small number of clubs and have seen 'new people' who have registered an interest to perform, and they have been ignored as an outsider - they were not part of the in-crowd. As a music venue I think it is imperative that newcomers both young and old be encouraged to have their say or chance to show what entertainment they can produce. (Facebook Survey 1)

A professional singer on the British and South African folk circuits offered a response in which she concurred with a view of folk clubs as incubi for the growth, development and encouragement of new music and new performers:

> The original ethos of a folk club was to expand the singing of folk songs, regardless of the quality of the voice. Nowadays I seldom hear a 'traditional' song, as most performers seem to want their songs to be recognized as part of the development of the genre. However, the friendship and community of many clubs is heartwarming. (Facebook Survey 1)

The presence and quality of non-professional floor acts provided a focus of concern for those other respondents who remarked on the image and viability of folk clubs and on people's willingness to pay for admission. Some recognised a function of folk clubs to provide an outlet for enthusiast musicians, or for those seeking to gain a foothold as a semi-professional act, but underpinned this with a view of audiences as consumers anticipating good quality performances:

> Most people go to be entertained and inspired, and my best nights are where I have been one or the other (or both). I agree that sometimes there are performers who can't hold a tune, get all the words wrong, and can't play their instruments, which doesn't do much for the audience (no matter how much we want to support and encourage amateurs). I will stick my neck out here and say that above a certain minimum level, the musicianship doesn't matter - once you can play a tune competently with a bit of flair, then you can hold an audience's attention and hopefully entertain if not inspire. (Facebook Survey 1)

> The standard of music - although important - is not the overriding factor for me. I'm quite happy to see artists who are still on their journey towards a better expertise - as long as they perform with belief and passion. (Facebook Survey 1)

Others were more vehement in their blame of floor singers and amateur musicians generally for a providing a poor experience for paying audiences expecting higher standards in performance:

> I don't go to many folk clubs any more. They're too depressing and the quality of music played is generally speaking, the wrong side of average. Folk festivals are much the same. There are some wonderful acoustic performers about (who might have been suitable for work in the folk world a few years back) now pursuing careers in mainstream music. I'd rather spend more money on quality. (Facebook Survey 1)

> Allowing too many floor spots with the result that a booked guest's performance is cut down will spoil the evening for most people. Going on until 11.45pm is not the answer by the way. (Facebook Survey 2)

Some respondents challenged the claim that floor spots in folk clubs provide an opportunity for new, would-be professional musicians to build on their experience of public performance and gain exposure on the folk scene. For example:

> For all the arguments that folk clubs are where people develop and hone their performance skills, this is far from typical; because of the confusing terminology used, I would suggest that many folk clubs are *not* folk clubs - they are in fact a singaround and play a very limited role in artist development. Many of the younger musicians now begin with some kind of performing arts qualification, having studied music to degree level etc. Many bands are born not on the folk club stage but in pub or festival sessions. (Facebook Survey 3)

Others expressed criticism of singarounds which appear to cater for floor singers' self-indulgence to the detriment of the interests of an audience:

> Some folk singarounds feel like criticism-free therapy for the players, and I feel that as an audience, I am validating a claim to be a 'performer' which feels false, because they are simply not trying to entertain or engage. Rant over. Music sessions are a different thing entirely! (Facebook Survey 1)

One respondent in this camp drew attention to the practice of charging audience members (albeit nominal amounts) for admission to the event:

> If someone who hasn't experienced a 'folk club' before suddenly fancies going to one to see what it is like, goes to a singaround type club, pays £2/£3/£4 on the door to get in and then

is treated to a circle of beginners who play wrong chords, wrong keys, and forget their words – that person is going to go away with the impression that 'folk music' is pretty droll!! I am the first one to encourage people to start out playing and singing folk songs/tunes, but before performing, in public of any description, they should have learned and practised the set first so they can at least deliver it with some confidence. (Facebook Survey 3)

Critics of the inclusion of floor spots in folk clubs have not only been concerned by the platform they provide for performances deemed to be of poor quality, but more broadly by the lack of control that they demonstrate by club organisers over performance output. Brocken (2003) identifies this as a difficulty for those supporters of folk music who were keen to preserve a sense of authenticity in the performance of traditional songs. This was one particular preoccupation for the Critics Group that was formed in 1964 by Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger (Lee 2001, and Lee 2002, p.83)[29]. The group comprised a weekly meeting of folk singers who worked under the direction of MacColl to establish the 'correct' way of singing traditional folk songs to maintain their authentic character in performance. According to Peggy Seeger:

There was quite a number of singers and players in the folk revival who were having trouble knowing *how* to sing songs. They were getting most of the songs from books – occasionally from old singers whose stylistic components had somewhat faded with the advance of age. (Seeger 2012)

Brocken summarises MacColl's criticism of floor singing as 'somewhat musically anarchic' (Brocken 2003, p.35), reflecting his (and the Critics Group's) concerns that vocal treatments or inflections of singers, including those influenced by American intonations (MacColl was reportedly critical for example of the singing of Bob Dylan – see Lee 2001), effectively undermined or dissipated the essence of songs as 'folk' songs (see Brocken 2003, pp.34-9, Lee 2001 and Harker 2007). While reflecting a concern, particularly associated with MacColl, with the preservation of a mode of performance that is deemed to be authentic and true to

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[29] There are some differences between accounts of when the group first met. The BBC Radio 4 documentary, 'How folk songs should be sung' (2012) stated that it was formed in 1965 while other sources date its inception as 1963 (e.g. the folkcatalogue's blog for the Argo record label which released the Critics Group's 1966 album *A Merry Progress to London:* <http://folkcatalogue.wordpress.com/2009/05/18/1966-the-critics-group-a-merry-progress-to-london>.

the character of 'folk', this aspect of the group's agenda also highlights an enduring tension that arises from floor singing: the practice embodies a distinctive quality of folk music as belonging to – and performed by – the rank and file but frequently does so at the expense of perceived notions of quality in musical performance and of professionalism in the organisation of the music event.

In all three case study clubs for this research, floor singing is not just encouraged but appears to constitute a vital element in the format and purpose of the event, such that the presence of, and contributions by amateur musicians are essential to their viability. Economically, the clubs could not function without the willingness of several people not only to perform free of charge but also, in the case of The Tump and Warwick Folk Clubs, to pay an admission fee alongside non-performing visitors. In spite of this encouragement, there is evidence that club organisers seek to establish a degree of control to reduce the 'risk' of audiences being deterred by the quality of performance and to maintain a sense of the authentic community experience which forms the ethos of folk music. Warwick Folk Club's approach is to allocate floor singers to performance slots which are set out as a structured running order on a sheet of paper, maintained by one of the organising team at the admissions table:

> You can write names in as they come through the door and then slot them in accordingly to
> try and get a varied programme – who's unaccompanied? what instruments? male or
> female? Get a reasonable mixture. But of course on those nights you never know how many
> people are actually going to come and you have to play it on the hoof. (Norman Wheatley –
> Warwick Folk Club)

This system, common to many folk clubs, is partly motivated by the desirability of enhancing audience experience through a balanced, varied and interesting night of entertainment and partly by a sense of fairness to the floor singers themselves:

> You want something strong for the closing of the first half and the closing of the night. In an
> ideal world, what many clubs used to have – some still do – is a resident group. Now we
> don't have that at this club. (…) It's sometimes quite hard to find the right act for closing the
> night. You don't want it to be too downbeat – you want to send people away with a smile on
> their face. There is a 'graveyard slot' which is second on after the compère. Our deal is that
> if they do a spot there, we'll give them a better spot as well later in the night as a reward for,

you know when the audience are still coming in and they're not settled in yet, they're not relaxed, in good voice, whatever. And we'll probably give that to someone who is reliable, who knows what they're doing and accepts that that's the thing – someone has got to do that slot. If there's only five people in the room, you've got to start! (Norman Wheatley)

The Tump Folk Club is open to all floor singers on singers' nights and singarounds but sometimes operates a deliberate policy of limiting the number of floor artistes or inviting musicians in advance to fulfil the role of floor artiste when specific guests have been booked:

> Some guest nights we have an 'open mic' and other times people pre-book. If it's someone I know and would like to sing in front of the act I might ask them to come and sing for that guest because I know they would enjoy it. We don't have that many people just drop in. We had one this week – an Australian – which was lovely and if that happens – we had it happen once before with an American guy – I think he called the day before. He was a lovely fiddle player and I asked him to do quite a lot although we're not likely to see him again, but if they do come back it's a bonus. (Karen Orgill – The Tump Folk Club)

The presence of floor singers at folk clubs indicates some ambivalence surrounding their role, status and relationships with other participants at the event. For those who are club regulars, or whose motivation to perform is not driven by self-promotion as would-be professional artistes, the act of arriving at a club, armed with a musical instrument, signals a willingness to fulfil a role that is integral to the perceived open and democratic character of the event, indeed a reinforcement of the structure of interaction in which the amateur musician plays a key part. For unaccompanied singers without the benefit of the visible 'prop' of an instrument, their adoption of floor singer status may need to be more explicitly signalled, usually by signing in at the door or otherwise making themselves known to the organiser. It is during the initial stage of arrival and gathering of participants (in dramaturgical terms, the 'first act'), that a practice of socialisation – or re-socialisation when participants are already known to each other – takes place to establish roles and anticipated modes of interaction. The ethos of floor singing may be translated into the apparent 'spontaneous' invitation by the club organiser of an audience member to stand and give an 'impromptu' performance from the 'floor' and it is not uncommon for that person to give the performance from where they are located in the room, rather than step up into the

'stage' area. In practice however, the social ritual is usually planned in advance during this primary phase of arrival or even to the extent of arranging floor spots prior to the evening of performance through advance booking by the musician or singer, or through invitation by the organiser.

While participants immersed in folk club discourse share expectations of the customary routines and procedures for establishing and confirming floor singer roles and running orders, music events whose structure does not fully reflect these procedural norms may require alternative and more explicit forms of communication with newcomers wishing to perform. For some folk clubs, this may take the form of printed notices or statements of 'club policy' on websites and publicity material. Others may require an overt verbal explication of the club's operating procedures by the organiser as would-be floor singers arrive. This often occurs during the arrival phase of a Sly Old Dogs and Friends session, necessitated by the event's structural ambiguity through its combination of the formats of music session, singaround and concert and tending to position all musicians in one location or performing area within the room. When taking on the MC role for that event, I usually approach new musicians as they arrive, or during the first interval, to explain how the evening is organised and invite them to join the musicians in the 'stage' area if they wish while reassuring them that they are welcome to perform from the floor if they prefer. Performers without instruments usually choose to remain seated in the audience and to sing unaccompanied from that location and it is sometimes necessary for an audience member or musician to draw the MC's attention to a possible singer who has not made himself or herself known but may have done so if there had been an admissions table or signing-in list for floor singers.

As an object-sign, the floor singer not only signifies a set of shared understandings of the club's structure, procedures and philosophy, but also points towards a specific set of relationships between the musical performers. The presence of floor singers and their associated paraphernalia – instrument cases, music stands, the signing-in list and the running order – may symbolise an open, egalitarian and community-orientated basis for the music-making and music-sharing experience, but discourses of professionalism and commercialism frequently intervene and undermine the status of the event as a

spontaneous gathering of amateurs. The impact of these external discourses is examined in more detail in Chapter 5, but it is notable at this point that the role and status of floor singers takes on a particular character within a perceived hierarchical and decidedly non-egalitarian framework. This is particularly evidenced by a comparison of status roles by floor singers and guest acts.

These roles are of course nuanced and not prescriptive. Not only does the concept of 'floor singer' apply to a range of people, from the faithful club regular to the showcasing visitor seeking a paid booking. Guest artists themselves may be touring professionals or members of the club's own community being provided the opportunity to present a 'feature' performance to fellow participants. There is nevertheless a set of role associations which appear to be relatively constant in folk clubs.

In contrast to floor singers, a musician or group of musicians designated as a 'guest' act is not only paid a fee (or, depending on the terms agreed with the club organiser, expenses or the results of a 'jug' collection) but is also accorded privileges of extended performance time, publicity and 'star' status. That act may be granted this status through their perceived musical skill but equally important is their embodiment of the values of the club and their capacity to provide an uplifting experience for the audience in keeping with their expectations as members of that music-orientated community. Organisers of Warwick Folk Club insist that this role is only filled by artistes that they have seen performing live on the basis that promotional videos and websites alone cannot give an indication of the nature of interaction likely to occur between that act and the club's audience within the more confined and intimate environment than that of a formal concert:

> Are they engaging? And this is an indefinable thing – can they make a connection with the audience? Do you feel that thing that you feel in a folk club that you maybe don't feel in a bigger venue because there are fewer people in the room therefore you feel that person is talking *to you* and singing *to you*. Some people have that amazing gift. You can only feel that by, I think, seeing them live. (Norman Wheatley – Warwick Folk Club)

Unlike the role of the regular floor singer, the guest role is based partly on the commodity value of that act and their capacity to attract a large enough audience to ensure the

continuing financial viability of the club. But it is also based on expectations that the act is capable of providing a focus for the particular mode of interaction associated with that club. The 'indefinable thing' that Norman Wheatley refers to suggests a quality of personal engagement that encompasses – but is more than – the possession of skills in music-making and public performance. The 'star' status associated with that role is signified by a range of object-signs – the name on the poster, the MC's introduction, the allocation of performance time, the 'encore' – signs which mark out the granting of that status by the club. Furthermore, this effectively constitutes a unifying community statement by the club about its identity, its promise of a fulfilling musical experience and its support for particular types of act on the folk circuit. This is especially noticeable when the 'guest' title (or even the title of 'feature artist') is conferred on a member of the club's own community, a floor singer or local musician who has supported the club through participation or has established a presence as a competent and entertaining performer on the local folk circuit. For one evening, that musician takes on the mantle of guest status and is thus made the object of special attention by fellow participants, often for only a token financial reward. By conferring this honour, and symbolically enacting presentation rituals reminiscent of celebrity culture, the club reinforces its own identity as a self-contained community of like-minded music-makers.

The audience member

Object-sign analysis demonstrates how a symbolic interactionist perspective can reveal – or at least allows for an interpretation of – the practice of music-making as one in which participants derive meanings and a sense of identity from the roles they assume or ascribe to fellow participants. Having argued that a 'role mantle' is conferred on guest acts at folk clubs, marking out for them a position within a hierarchical structure as distinct from that occupied by floor singers, I shall consider how the position of audience member also entails the expression of an identity through role-play and how this perspective may offer insights into audience identity that are not so readily apparent when audiences are regarded as receivers in a communicative relationship, or consumers within an economic or promotional framework of interaction.

Reflection on contextual demographics may provide some initial insight into the sense of identity shared by folk club audiences. A frequently expressed concern within today's folk movement is that folk club audiences are getting older and clubs are not attracting enough younger people. This point was included in comments by John Richards (2011a) on the 'Demon Barbers' blog, which launched the *Folk 21* support group for folk clubs (see page 40). Various accounts of the folk club movement appear to confirm the increase in the average age of folk club visitors. Respondents to Hield's (2010) research include groups of folk club participants – observed *in situ*, keeping diaries or taking part in interviews and a focus group – whose ages range from 20 to 60 but with the majority in their 50s (Hield 2010, pp.22-3). Fifteen years before she conducted her fieldwork, Niall MacKinnon noted a bulge in the age distribution of folk club audiences for 30-45 year olds with very few teenagers or people aged above 50 (MacKinnon 1993, p.43). He found that nearly half of his respondents first attended folk clubs in their 20s, despite the lack of participants in that age group at the time of his survey. Teenagers were attracted to the folk scene up to the 1980s but by the 1990s they were no longer interested. It appeared then, as now, that the folk club scene was an ageing movement, seemingly bypassed by many younger folk musicians who build their performing experience on alternative platforms including 'open mic' sessions, folk festivals and in schools, colleges and universities.

If the majority of today's folk club audience tends to reflect the same generation, it is likely that their attachment to the folk club circuit may be linked to a range of social and experiential factors in addition to their interest in the music. Georgina Boyes comments on the membership of the emerging folk club scene in the 1950s:

> As folk clubs began to spread across the country, their membership and performers were
> initially recruited among left-wing activists, bohemian remnants of wartime Fitzrovia and the
> masses of young enthusiasts attracted to the American vernacular music of the skiffle boom.
> The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, and its youth wing YCND, brought many people
> into contact with oppositional folksong and, eager to hear more, large numbers then joined
> local folk clubs. Other left-wing organisations, such as the Woodcraft Folk and Christian
> Socialist groups, also included folk music in their social events and often familiarity
> encouraged participation in the Revival.' (Boyes 1993, p.234)

This new enthusiasm for folk music, located in the period identified as the 'second' folk revival (see chapter 1.3), contrasted with the more conservative approach associated with motivation of the 'first' folk revival to conserve and educate. It reflected a culture of challenges to the post-war (and cold war) orthodoxy newly articulated through protest songs and the replacement of the modernist mass society paradigm with the search for individuality and self-expression. This contrast is picturesquely demonstrated in Dave Arthur's (1984) comments on the folk scene in the 1950s and 60s, cited by Boyes:

> ...a dive your parents would never approve of, a 'sweaty, scruffy, smoke-filled basement room', subversive songs and their even more subversive singers – bohemians 'with scant regard for middle-class conventions, who exploded through life trailing a string of girlfriends, ex-wives, children, friends, foes and a host of apocryphal legends' [in] contrast with suburbia, the bland pop of a Mecca ballroom or table tennis at the Youth Club. (Boyes 1993, p.234)

While folk club audience members, whose involvement dates back to this period, may have initially rebelled against middle-class ideas, MacKinnon's folk club audience survey thirty years later indicated a higher average socio-economic position for folk club audiences compared with the population of Great Britain, alongside a higher average educational qualification. In his audience profile, folk appealed across most social classes but tended towards middle- and upper middle-class. There was however a greater tendency among his respondents to vote Labour than the general population. (MacKinnon 1993, pp.44-7)

Existing research into folk club audiences, undertaken by parties interested in refining and improving the experience of visiting a folk club, often focuses on the stated expectations of audience members and their motivations for attending folk events. For example, a survey of visitors to folk festivals[30], undertaken in 2011 on behalf of the UK Folk Club Network included the question 'What would make you more likely to attend a folk club?' An

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[30] Survey results can be downloaded from
<http://www.bryancreer.com/UKFCN/FCNdata/FestivalSurveyExcelData.xls>

overview of the 45 responses to this question reveals certain themes underpinning expressed opinions[31]. These include:

- the physical aspects of the venue and its environment:

  good venue; good sound and lighting; well ventilated room; real ale; a venue within walking distance or with public transport links; good comfortable space for sitting and listening and playing and somewhere to put instrument cases!

- the organisation of the club:

  more professional; better time keeping; an early and prompt start with resident singers or musicians willing to give a good start; better advertising of who's on when; I don't/ won't go to clubs that don't have floor singers!

- the type and standard of music played at the club and the quality of guest artists:

  quality guests, good supports, less predictability; mainly traditional material; better ideas, more international folk acts; would like to attend a local club provided the standard of performers was good – not too 'finger-in-yer-ear!'

- and the social atmosphere of the occasion:

  welcoming feeling on arrival; friendlier clubs - less cliques/closed music sessions; opportunities to socialise with others - to be able to discuss the music as well as to listen; learning opportunities; a vibrant atmosphere, very few in jokes, socially enlightened i.e.: not the slightest chance of encountering racism, homophobia, or any other patronising or hostile superior attitudes; good sharp, deep, fresh, thoughtful, joyous, generous, exciting, loving grounded singing!; the re-introduction of a sense of humour into folk clubs. (Richards 2011b)

A characteristic common to many of these responses, arguably encouraged by the wording of the question, is the positioning of audience members, and potential audience members,

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[31]   The open-ended question included the request: please provide as many suggestions as you can. All responses can be downloaded from <http://www.bryancreer.com/UKFCN/FCNdata/FestivalSurveyQ17.pdf>. A similar range of responses was recorded from an online survey undertaken in 2011 by the same organisation. Results can be downloaded from <http://www.bryancreer.com/UKFCN/FCNdata/OnlineSurveyQ16.pdf>.

as holding a set of demands and expectations, some related to the quality of entertainment and some to perceptions on the role of folk clubs in promoting and reinforcing the ethos of the folk movement. Indeed, some respondents saw the role of the folk club as extending beyond that of sharing music and entertaining visitors to take on more of an 'outreach' function with activity to draw in new and younger audiences:

> Opportunity to learn singing/playing from others e.g. workshops like those run by Lewes Folk Club. Singarounds organised by club to gain experience separately from main club night. A notice board - electronic or actual at club for people to exchange offers of tuition/practice. Approaching local schools offering "folk demo" concerts by local young folk talent; Need to get more young people involved; new audiences tend to still be 55+. (Folk 21, 2011)

Responses to the social media survey conducted as part of my research also demonstrate how audience members articulate expectations and demands, although, as pointed out in Chapter 2.3, the survey was intended for exploration of intersubjective issues arising from the meanings that audience members derive from a visit to a folk club and their stated personal motivations for attending such events. Hence the question *For an enjoyable night out at the folk club, how important is the standard of music being played?* produced some insight into audience members' perception of folk clubs as sites for social interaction:

> The atmosphere is vital - I like to be in a welcoming environment where there is respect and acceptance shown by other audience members. (Facebook Survey 1)

> … whether we have a guest or not, our club is a social meeting place of (reasonably) like-minded people. (Facebook Survey 1)

> The thing I enjoy about folk clubs most of all is the community, the social aspect of meeting like minded people and sharing knowledge. (Facebook Survey 1)

> I'd much rather sit with 'poor' musicians for 3 hours and have good craic, than sit with people with egos as big as their backsides. (Facebook Survey 1)

A note of caution was expressed by several respondents that a gathering that is primarily social should not develop into a clique:

> The majority of folk clubs are a weekly social gathering for members who enjoy each other's company. The social side can be more important than the music for a good night out.

Equally, that can make it difficult for any casual visitor to a club where everyone knows everyone else. (Facebook Survey 1)

There are a few folk clubs I have visited where I have felt uncomfortable and an 'outsider'. The musicians seemed to be a group who did not want a new performer to join in with their evening and take up a floor spot, if a floor spot was allocated it was clearly grudged; on these occasions talent or lack of it would have no bearing on it because they would have no clue what me or my companion were likely to sound like. The most irritating thing about this is the fact these particular clubs are often advertising themselves and describing themselves as friendly or all welcome. (Facebook Survey 1)

A similar concern was expressed by one respondent, critical of a repetitive and ritualised level of interaction occurring when participants appear to support each other's mediocrity:

I found that many folk clubs had become a comfort blanket for those attending/performing. The same people, the same venue, the same songs, the same jokes week on week, month on month, year on year. There appeared to be no interest in doing anything else, or in many cases, in working up a song to a performance standard before actually performing it, let alone visiting another venue to get inspiration from even a top artist. (Facebook Survey 1)

The role of folk club participants as members of a social (and socialising) group is addressed from a club organiser's perspective by Norman Wheatley:

One thing that I'm aware of is not to get too much like a clique with the audience. You tend to know the audience by name after a while – not every single person. I know what it's like when you go to a folk club on your own and nobody talks to you. And they announce themselves as 'the friendliest club in the Midlands' and I think, 'no you're not – you've not said a blind word to me all night'. So it's very hard not to when you tend to get the same kind of core of regular people as the audience, but I like to think it is the kind of social situation where people can come – and certainly can come on their own – and certainly females on their own as well. We have a policy … that if we see someone who's come for the first time we go up and say hello to them. (Norman Wheatley – Warwick Folk Club)

Norman also suggests that the performance of music by participants can itself become the instigator for positive social interaction:

So many times I've been to a club, sung a song – why would somebody talk to me normally if I was just sitting there in the audience. I've sung a song and someone comes up and says 'I

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like that song' or 'I know this song by him, do you know it?' It's just a fantastic conversation starter. (Norman Wheatley)

Other motivations expressed by respondents to the social media survey for participating as audience members including involvement in the development of musical tradition, developing skills and knowledge as musicians and performers, and the encouragement of new musical talent, but the social aspect of the folk club was a common and recurring theme with frequent use of such terms as 'community' and 'like-minded people'. For some respondents, statements that the quality of music was the most important motivator for them to visit folk clubs were qualified by explanations of what constituted 'quality' for them as audience members:

> There's a balance to be had between the quality of singer and the interest in the songs they perform. I'd rather see an average performer with great material than a brilliant performer with poor material. (Facebook Survey 1)

> Nothing is more important than the music, although 'standard' can be widely interpreted. In folk music vocal and instrumental musicianship needs to be combined with authenticity of style, scholarship and passion to reach deep into the soul. But there should always be encouragement for improving novices, not forgetting the role of organisers and residents in maintaining a warm atmosphere. (Facebook Survey 1)

While the range of responses to the social media survey may be regarded as indicative of audience opinion – rather than representative of it in any quantifiable sense – the number of responses, the enthusiasm with which they were offered and the overt expressions of interest in this research that accompanied many of the contributions, indicate an interest on the part of audience members to reflect in some depth on their experiences of folk clubs and their motivations for attending them. Opinions were often articulated with passion and vigour, and an interpretation of these as expressions of consumer demand would not take adequate account of the commitment, indicated by many of these respondents, to folk music as a cultural movement or cause.

Cultural theory has witnessed a shift in the conception of audience. The 'mass, passive receiver' targeted by an industry of cultural production, as characterised in the 1920s and

30s by the Frankfurt School's perspective of audiences as vulnerable to media effects and uncritically receptive of the banality of the 'culture industry' (Adorno 1991), has been largely replaced by a more 'active' construction of audiences seeking music as a source of pleasure and gratification (see for example, Blumler and Katz 1974), or of identity and expression of fandom (see Lewis 1992). Biocca (1988) characterises mass communication theory post-Frankfurt School as unduly focused on the question of who is in control of meaning - 'a kind of theoretical tug-of-war' (p.51) between 'the *active audience*: individualistic, "impervious to influence", rational, selective' to 'the *passive audience*: conformist, gullible, anomic, vulnerable, victims' (*ibid.*)

Nevertheless, the notion of engaging with audiences who do interpret from their own experiential and cultural terms of reference, as indicated for example in David Morley's work on television audiences (1980, 1986), based on Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding theory (1980) dominates contemporary cultural theory, even if the polarised passive-active dichotomy has become more nuanced and focused on discursive relationships between audiences and texts. Thus drawing on Bourdieu's (1984a) ideas on 'cultural economy', John Fiske (1992) conceives of an audience role that goes beyond the practice of reception or consumption of texts to a more productive and participative role of establishing and reinforcing social bonds *through* musical texts. His argument suggests that fans work actively with the products of popular culture: 'Fans make their culture out of the commercial commodities (texts, stars, performances) of the cultural industries' (Fiske 1992, p.46).

While this approach brings us nearer, in my view, to the status of audience as 'object-sign' within the world of amateur music-making, especially in the smaller and less formal folk club environment, such a concept of audience remains enmeshed in the notion of consumption as a cultural practice, tied in with folk music as a specialist and defining genre – in Bourdieu's terms, a form of 'cultural capital' which is appreciated within a 'folk' community, sharing a set of understandings and knowledge about the style and provenance of folk (or folkish) songs and tunes. This may be the case for many well-established folk clubs, concerts and festivals but where this interpretation of audience practice falls short, within the context of *amateur* music-making, is in its insistence that their engagement with musical

performance is a form of consumption. This is partly a result of the popular connotation of the term, 'audience' within media and cultural studies as a body of people who listen or receive communicated texts as outputs of cultural production. Like any well-behaved audience group, folk club 'audiences' usually do 'sit quietly and listen' to musical performances before showing appreciation through applause. But what is interesting and significant at amateur music events is that they do this (usually), even when the quality of the performance is, by professional standards, poor.

It is not uncommon at folk clubs and sessions to witness floor singers – even guest acts on occasion – stumble over words and chords, forget lyrics, play 'bum notes', sing or play instruments out of tune or generally give an unpolished performance. For amateur musicians, this is an almost inevitable result of their taking the opportunity to perform in public without having undertaken a level of rehearsal or musical training to meet what might be termed as 'professional' standards. As some of the social media survey responses have demonstrated, it is often a concern of folk fans, seeking to 'professionalise' and popularise folk music, that such performances give folk clubs, and the folk movement generally, a 'bad name'. Nevertheless amateur musicians do meet and perform to an 'audience', which may well comprise other amateur musicians waiting for their 'turn', for example in a singaround event. And when amateur musicians gather to perform and share their music, with their varying degrees of quality and expertise (being 'amateur' does not necessarily mean being a 'poor' musician!), it is arguably inaccurate and insufficient to define the 'audience' as a body of consumers, or punters, no matter how 'active' this practice of consumption may be construed.

While observation of interaction between participants at folk clubs may suggest a large degree of conformity by audience members to the roles of passive consumers prescribed by the *mise-en-scène*, it reveals an ongoing dynamism of negotiation and transaction that underpins intersubjective behaviour and hence strains Goffman's dramaturgical model. Observation of social interaction at folk clubs may provide indicators of ritualistic (or symbolically 'scripted') behaviour but this does not, in itself, provide a full characterisation of the event as a form of social or community practice. It is likely that much of the explanation for outward displays of behaviour reflect social pressures for a folk club

participant to conform to a discursive framework or, in Mead's terms, 'assume the attitudes of those in the group who are involved with him in his social activities' (Mead 1932, p.192, cited in Cronk 1973). However, some of my social media survey responses, alongside 'offstage' comments by participants at folk clubs, appear to reflect alternative discourses and indicate tensions and dissent on their part whereby the prescribed rules of interaction within a folk club could be challenged or rejected, for example by those respondents who state that they will no longer go to folk clubs for reasons ranging from quality of performance to cliquish behaviour.

From a symbolic interactionist perspective, the concept of 'audience' as an object-sign within the context of a music-making event is more complex than that of appreciative observers or receivers of musical products. From my own observations through participation and interpretation of interactive behaviour at folk clubs, I would contend that participants, when not actually performing, are not just 'consuming' the performances of their fellow participants but are providing cohesiveness and meaning to the occasion by '*acting the role*' of audience. This does not mean that their appreciation of others' performances is not genuinely felt and spontaneous; their applause may also constitute a reaffirmation of their overall enjoyment of the folk club as an entertaining as well as a social occasion. However, when performances fall short of shared expectations of professional standards in musicianship, the primary motivation at many folk clubs becomes one of support, encouragement and appreciation of the effort and willingness of the performer to contribute to the event and express and share through music a repertoire that reflects their interests and personality. This is especially the case for singers' nights, singarounds and sessions where little or no admission has been charged, but even a guest night may involve a degree of tolerance and sanction on the part of participants who take on the audience role.

On some occasions, appreciation of performance is expressed with ironic enthusiasm, especially when the performance makes up in humour what it lacks in finesse. I often witness this form of mock interplay between 'performer' and 'audience' at the Sly Old Dogs and Friends sessions where interaction between participants is often based on light-hearted banter and informality. On other occasions at amateur music-making events, participants

will often prompt the performer who may have forgotten the lyrics of a popular folk song by joining in and encouraging them to continue. And on extreme occasions where the performer actually 'gives up' halfway through a song because of errors in accompaniment or forgotten lyrics, 'audience' members may urge them to try again or make supportive comments to lessen the tension and seek to put them at their ease. Such expressions of support and encouragement signify a willingness by participants to be 'an audience' but are motivated by social priorities to reinforce the event's locus within a supportive environment in which amateur musicians are not intimidated by expectations of 'professional' standards of performance.

Chapter 4.4: Physical object-signs

Having considered the roles and identities of participants in the domain of amateur music-making, our focus shifts now to the physical objects that make up the terrain of interaction, considering their functional roles and, in keeping with an analysis based on the notion of intersubjectivity, their roles as object-signs. As in the previous section, this part of the analysis is necessarily selective in order to illustrate the significance of inanimate objects within this category. Those objects in particular that may be characterised as symbolic elements in the 'text' of music-making at folk clubs are the room's *furniture*, which is used to adapt the environment of the venue into the most appropriate setting for music-making as a social event, and *musical instruments*, brought into the domain by the participants themselves and capable of generating a multitude of messages to reaffirm the nature of the event and the identities of the protagonists.

Setting the symbolic (and literal) stage

A starting point for observation of objects and their impact on social performance is the setting in which it takes place – the folk club itself as 'stage'. Expectations of types of social interaction and behaviour may be clearly signalled to participants, not least through the proxemic arrangements of space and furniture. Within Goffman's dramaturgical metaphor, such arrangements constitute the 'setting' or permanent location for a specific mode of social interaction (i.e. taking part in an evening at a folk club):

> ..those who would use a particular setting as part of their performance cannot begin their
> act until they have brought themselves to the appropriate place and must terminate their
> performance when they leave it. (Goffman 1959, p.22)[32]

In the preceding section, I refer to the 'first act' or initial phase of an amateur music event as the time when participants arrive and socialise, or resocialise by affirming their presence, their role and their willingness to be players in the ensuing drama. However, prior to this for

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[32] See Kivisto and Pittman (2007) for one of numerous examples of application of Goffman's 'metaphor of life as theater' (p.272).

many clubs is the establishment of the physical territory. Keeping to the theatrical analogy, this may be considered as the 'prologue' or contextualisation which, if witnessed by anyone other than the organisers (with or without the help of volunteer 'backstage' personnel), provides a more intimate insight into the staging process. Smith (1987) refers the first 'scene' of the overall performance at his folk club as 'assembly', i.e. relocating the furniture, setting up the PA system and organising the territory such that it 'takes on a socially meaningful texture' (p.156) which contributes towards the definition of roles and status of those who will participate in the performance. From my own experience of helping to run folk clubs, I have observed considerable attention to detail in this process by some organisers to ensure that every chair in the room is positioned to facilitate a clear view of the stage area, good access to a table to place drinks, and unobstructed routes to enable quick access to the stage by performers and to the bar, the door or fire exits by all participants; this is followed by expressions of irritation by the organiser when audience members arrive and start to rearrange the furniture for their personal comfort and convenience.

In functional terms, arrangement of space is a vital process for many folk clubs and meeting places for amateur musicians, often because of variances from one week to the next of the format of the event itself. Organisers of both The Tump and Warwick Folk Clubs apply clearly defined strategies in the arrangement of space to establish the 'rules of engagement' for each of their weekly meetings.

> We will get here about half past seven, about three quarters of an hour before the night
> kicks off. We lay out the room – the chairs, because at the moment the chairs are four
> around each table. On a guest night, we'll have them in rows with tables in between so that
> people can see – a proper performance. A singaround night is normally in a circle with
> everyone doing one song each, or two, whatever anyone wants to do ... And the other sort
> of night we have is a singers' night with singers playing on stage, three songs in turn with a
> host again. Because I have a lot of the ladies come to the club who go to the WI on the first
> Thursday of the month, I tend to keep that as a singaround night because they tend not to
> like being on the stage. They are happier in the circle. (Karen Orgill – The Tump Folk Club)

We've got a strange room. It can be L-shaped, so we've got a long narrow room which we

can use on Performers Nights because it's more intimate for a nice atmosphere. We open up

the other branch of the L, which is wider, for guests when we have a few more people and

we need a bit more space. Or on rare occasions, we can run it – if you imagine standing on

the bottom corner of the L – so you've got two branches of the room. You need to do a bit of

swivelling of the neck to get eye contact with the audience but it means you can get around

70-80 people in there. (Norman Wheatley – Warwick Folk Club)

As a *mise-en-scène* for a 'singaround' evening at The Tump Folk Club, the circular arrangement of chairs signifies a rejection of performance-audience hierarchy and instead offers an egalitarian space for participation in which each person is encouraged to contribute an act of performance. Within this setting, the running order is not usually determined by such factors as musical aptitude or perceived 'star status' for any of the musicians who take part, but more by initial agreement of whether performers take turn in a clockwise or anti-clockwise direction.

Seating arrangements for guest nights, or more structured singers' nights, follow the more conventional format of a concert or cabaret event, with seats facing a stage area and usually with tables within easy reach for drinks and personal belongings (*Appendix G*). At the time of this research, The Tump took place in a room that included a raised stage area. The function room was equipped with stage lights and a bar, although these were never used for the folk club, providing a constant reminder to participants that their event was not fully integrated into the management of the social club and that their access only to facilities of the venue was restricted. The stage itself was only a few inches above floor level but was enough to be designated as a performance area. Ironically during singarounds, the stage was pointedly ignored or used as a storage area for instrument cases.

Many folk clubs take place in rooms with no raised stage but still allude to a 'stage' area for guest nights and singers nights through the organisation of other furnishings. This is the case for Warwick Folk Club where performance space is indicated through the direction of chairs in the room and the sparsity of furniture in that area. For guest nights, chairs are placed in parallel rows with a central aisle and no tables are provided, requiring visitors to place their

drinks on the floor beneath their chairs. Like The Tump, Warwick Folk Club meets in a function room which, in this case, is located on the ground floor of a hotel, furnished with stackable chairs, some tables and self-standing partitions (*Appendix H*). While the arrangement of furniture on their 'Featured Guest Nights' and 'Concert Nights' clearly indicate a territory for audience and for performers, any sense of a barrier between the two is downplayed. There are no footlights or banks of monitors to divide them or detract from the level of intimacy that the organisers seek to achieve; indeed the use of any form of public address system is not mandatory or deemed to be essential.

> Sometimes, we do a little simple amplification just so that the person who's singing doesn't have to stretch but we try to make it so that it isn't a barrier that I know that some people feel that a PA is. (Norman Wheatley)

In common with Warwick and The Tump Folk Clubs, the arrangement of the furniture indicates a clear territorial division between Sly Old Dogs and their audience. Most of the musicians sit on a row of chairs positioned alongside the wall furthest away from the entrance to the room. As there are usually more musicians than space to accommodate them in this area, the row continues along part of the adjacent wall so that the performers sit in an elongated L shape. The instruments (mostly guitars, banjos and mandolins[33]) are placed on the musicians' own instrument stands or on tables positioned alongside the wall behind the musicians' chairs. Some performers also set up their own music stands with songbooks and crib notes; the performance area is therefore marked out by a loose barrier of music and instrument stands. The rest of the room is occupied by audience members who are seated around tables in a 'cabaret style' arrangement (*Appendix I*).

Most folk clubs also have furniture and space designated for management tasks, promotion of the club and other events in the local folk circuit, and raffle prizes. Whether her club is hosting a guest night, singers' night or singaround, the organiser of The Tump invariably sits at her own table throughout most of the evening, located strategically near the entrance for the room.

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[33] Other instruments commonly played are fiddles, whistles, bodhrans, mando-cello and euphonium.

I'll be sat up here by the balcony where I think there's least disturbance for everybody

because as an organiser you get people come and talk to you and ask questions so I try and

keep that discreet and not interrupt the singing. (Karen Orgill)

The table is where admission is charged, with money kept in a small cash box. There is also a list on the table where floor singers may sign in on singers' nights, plus books of cloakroom tickets and a container for the raffle. Adjacent tables hold a display of raffle prizes, publicity material for the club and other local folk events, guest artists' CD recordings and other merchandising material and, on special occasions, for example a birthday, a cold buffet. On singers' and guest nights, the organiser also places battery-powered candles that change colour on tables 'to give it some atmosphere'.

Organisers of Warwick Folk Club provide a more complex 'kit' of equipment and materials to augment the furnishings provided by the venue and hence establish a specific experience for participants.

We have a banner to put up. I think it's nice to have identity for the club. We can hang this

on the back wall and it's just part of the atmosphere. We have a portable display of all the

other things that are going on in the area. Yes we plug our place but we are very happy to

promote other performers' or singers' venues, tours or whatever, so we've got a huge notice

board, kind of portable pasting table. We get that out, open it up, display our dates, other

people's dates, posters, fliers, tables full of stuff. (Norman Wheatley)

Opened up and placed on its side across a tabletop, the portable display board (*Appendix J*) signals a rapid transformation from the 'blank canvas' of the hotel's function room to the club's own specific domain. Located in clear view of the entrance to the room, it provides a focal point for participants as they arrive and a location for take-away items, ranging from flyers and posters of other local folk venues and events to reading materials specially prepared by the club's organising committee and complementing information available on the club's regularly updated website.

We've got a newsletter on the web of what we've done on previous months – I print those

as well, stick them in a folder so there's something for someone to read during the interval if

they want to. If I've read a magazine with an interesting article – I've got one just now, 'The

20 folk albums that rocked the 60s' – I shall cut that out, stick it in a folder. (Norman Wheatley)

The display board functions as a key prop for the club's setting, providing a repository and location for promotional materials and literature but signifying also the club's self-perceived position within a local folk network and an affirmation of engagement within the wider folk community. While it does not charge for membership as a club, it nevertheless signals a benefit of access to news and background information for all who have paid admission to enter the room.

Other props include signs and notices providing directions and information about admission and etiquette ('please don't come in while the performers are singing'), plus an iPod system for ambient music, reflecting the career skills of Norman Wheatley as a former radio presenter.

> Personally, I like to have music playing of some kind when you walk in the room. Some people think 'ooh no this is getting a bit too organised for a folk club'. Why not? It's an entertainment venue. We start at 8.00. If you don't start on time, people will never come on time. So, I have 20 minutes of music that will end at 8.00. And I time it. An iPod will tell you how long a set of music is. I start the music at 20 minutes before 8. It stops – time for us to start. And I do the same in the intervals as well. (Norman Wheatley)

The use of ambient music indicates a motive similar to that behind the placement of battery-powered candles on the tables at the Tump: an attempt to establish an atmosphere or mood conducive to the anticipated activities of a social group that has formed for the evening for the purposes of engaging in – and sharing an interest in – the performance and reception of music. In addition, the timing of the recorded music serves a function of managing the event by providing a cue to all participants for the commencement of the evening's formalities. This, alongside the positioning of props and arrangement of furniture, represents in Goffman's terms a process of setting the stage (Goffman 1959, pp.22-3) that is both deliberate and ritualistic. While Goffman applies the term 'setting' as a noun to describe the environment in which specific types of personal interaction are facilitated, we may also apply it as a present participle when considering the importance for amateur music-makers to *adapt* the environment for their own intersubjective purposes. Thus the

environment is designed simultaneously to constrain and control the movements and positioning of 'actors' and to provide a structured and systematised language of objects, spatial relationships and ambience in which the roles and modes of social action are designated to participants as a framework to underpin discursive practice. As the actors step past the symbolic threshold of the table at the door, their presence and interaction – and in many cases their own props of musical instruments and related paraphernalia – reinforce the mutual understanding of roles to be played and persona to be adopted: the guest act, the floor singer, the compère, the committee member, the audience member, and so on.

<u>Meanings embedded in musical instruments</u>

As object-signs, musical instruments brought into the domain by participants establish a group identity for the community and individual identities for each protagonist. Considered from this perspective, the presence of certain instruments may be interpreted as a visible reaffirmation of the group's social purpose as well as indicators of the expected nature of interactions and the texture of the social and musical experience. To illustrate this, I will focus on levels of meaning associated with musical instruments usually played during a typical evening with Sly Old Dogs and Friends.

There are three immediate and self-evident observations: (i) *all instruments are acoustic*; (ii) *all instruments are relatively simple to play*; and (iii) *all instruments are associated with folk music*. Considering these points in turn, and the contribution made by musical instruments to the social and intersubjective experience of participants, it is possible to identify frameworks of significance even before a single note is played.

Firstly, the use of *acoustic* instruments by Sly Old Dogs and their accompanying musicians should be viewed within the wider contextual issues of amplified folk music. In spite of resistance to the practice, amplification has been a feature of many folk clubs since the 1960s. Positions in the debate on whether PA systems are appropriate in a folk club environment have changed little since they were outlined by MacKinnon (1993, pp.123-6) but the mediating effect of amplification is widely recognised:

> PA does not just raise the volume level but also redefines the nature of the performance, and is itself a powerful statement of the separation of roles between performer and audience. It restructures the power relationship. (MacKinnon 1993, pp.120-1)

MacKinnon further argues that PA systems can create barriers to chorus singing by audiences and reduce the possibility of banter and dialogue between performers and audience members although my own experience of folk clubs suggests that skilful use of a PA system does not deter or inhibit informal interaction. PA systems are used on occasion at Warwick Folk Club but usually when supplied by the guest act and regarded as necessary for sound balance, for example if a band line-up combines acoustic instruments with an electric bass. The Tump Folk Club has increasingly used amplification for its 'singers night' format, mainly because one of the club regulars offers to supply his own PA system for the club's use, effectively transforming the event into an 'open mic' format. However, both clubs take place in rooms where amplification is not vital to audibility of performances and it is not uncommon for floor singers to stand pointedly in front of the microphone stands and perform acoustically to – and in closer proximity with – their audience.

Neither is folk music inimical to the use of electric musical instruments, as the worldwide folk-rock movement has testified since the late 1960s (Sweers 2005). This established itself shortly after Bob Dylan's egregious use of an electric guitar at Newport Folk Festival in 1965 during which event, audience reaction reportedly included such comments as 'Play folk music! ... Sell out! ... This is a folk festival! ... Get rid of that band!' (Shelton 1986, p.302). While electric instruments and drum kits are now commonplace in folk concerts, festivals and ceilidhs, the convention and expectation has endured for instrumentation at folk clubs to be acoustic or, at least, with sympathetic use of electric instruments to augment an essentially acoustic sound.

The relative simplicity in preparing acoustic instruments for performance constitutes part of the essentially informal character of the amateur music-making event. On arrival at Sly Old Dogs and Friends, musicians may engage in preparatory 'first act' activity of setting up music stands, tuning instruments, etc., but the impression and association with the presence of acoustic instruments is the expectation of spontaneous and impromptu performance,

whereby musicians can join in with each other without the need of a sound check. One precedent for this form of musical interaction is the Irish music session or *craic* in which performance, while structured and based on learned and shared repertoires of tunes, is an intrinsically shared and social activity; Foy (1999) offers an amusing and frequently cited summary of Irish music session etiquette. Some of the melody musicians who attend a typical Sly Old Dogs evening (playing fiddle, banjo, mandolin, whistle) are also regular participants in local music session events and often draw on their knowledge and experience of these to perform tune sets based on simple keys and chord sequences to enable the less experienced amateur musicians to join in. The legacy of Sly Old Dogs' previous band, The Oddsods (see page 105) also plays a part in the choice of material played: well-known and popular songs from Irish and Scottish traditions, such as *Black Velvet Band* or *The Gypsy Laddie-o* are often performed, with most of the attending musicians picking up their acoustic instruments and joining in with the basic chords or simple melody lines.

Arguably an even more important precursor to the folk club as an acoustic music-making domain is the short-lived popularity of skiffle. Brocken (2003) points to the impact of skiffle in the 1950s as a foundation to popular music in Britain and its emphasis on the use of acoustic instruments in smaller, intimate blues, jazz and folk venues:

> By introducing thousands of young people to the delights of playing acoustic instruments
> (far more successfully than the efforts of Ewan MacColl and Douglas Kennedy), the … skiffle
> boom changed the trajectory of all British popular music for ever. (Brocken 2003, p.68)

It is plausible to attribute the dominance of acoustic instruments at folk clubs in part to the legacy of the appeal of skiffle as 'a "do-it-yourself" style of music' incorporating 'a simple rhythm section (homemade string bass and washboard), augmented by banjo and guitars' (Shuker 2002, p.273). Although no washboards or tea-chest basses are present at Sly Old Dogs and Friends, one audience member (and on occasion, the pub's landlord!) has been known to accompany the guitarists and banjo-players on spoons, particularly when the host band breaks into a lively performance of songs associated with the skiffle movement, such as *Worried Man Blues* or *Rollin' In My Sweet Baby's Arms*.   Stratton's observation on the

accessibility of skiffle reinforces its role as one influence on contemporary music-making as a socialising practice:

> At a time in England when popular music was dominated by professionals such as Dickie
> Valentine, Petula Clark and Frankie Vaughan, and controlled by the music industry that
> looked to adults for sales, and when there was a perceived divide between the making of
> music and its consumption, skiffle, with its cheap and often homemade instruments, such as
> the washboard, and easily learnt American folk songs, enabled a reconnection, for urban
> English working-class youth especially, with a tradition of informal music-making. (Stratton
> 2010, p.33)

The essential simplicity of shared music-making experience, rooted in Irish and English vernacular traditions, has therefore contributed to the communal and signifying role of acoustic instruments within the amateur music-making discursive framework. Acoustic instruments, especially guitars, also facilitate the celebration of songs in styles identified with British and American singer-songwriters, encapsulating humanistic messages and social values within the experience of simple melody lines and choruses, easily learned by musicians and readily shared within the musicking community through the reaffirming experience of performance and audience participation (see Gustafson and Place, 2009).

Electric instruments are virtually non-existent at Sly Old Dogs and Friends events and musicians perform without the use of PA system. The natural resonance of some instruments, such as the banjo, fiddle or tin whistle, allows them to dominate the gentler tones of acoustic guitar or mandolin and some participating musicians have observed that the organisation of the room, in which most of them sit in a straight line in front of the back wall, can sometimes make it difficult for them to hear each other when performing together. They nevertheless appear to accept this arrangement as preferable to that of using a PA with audio monitors and the restrictions that this would impose on the communal practice of music-making that is the essential feature of this event.

Putting aside the impracticality of amplified and electric instruments at sessions like Sly Old Dogs and Friends, the presence of acoustic instruments as a broad category – and the ways in which they are positioned and used – provides a clear statement about the social

relations between amateur musicians and their audience and the nature of performance, musical *and* interactive, likely to occur throughout the evening. While the seating arrangements of the room proclaim that the musicians are presenting a 'show', the instruments are compatible with the versatility of a pub music session and the informality and inclusiveness of this as a primarily social occasion. The audience is not about to be assailed by loud, imposing music, but a chance to participate with musicians on a more equal footing. Some audience members – those known to have a repertoire of songs – will themselves be called on to sing unaccompanied from where they are sitting.

The status of musical instruments as being *relatively easy to play* reinforces the sense of informality of the session. This is not to belittle the performance skills of many of the musicians who regularly attend Sly Old Dogs and Friends which, in some cases, are considerably advanced. However, the style of performance, combined with the practice of finding (or being told) the musical key and joining in with the musician and singer who is 'leading' with a particular tune set or song, positions this form of music-making within a public domain. In compositional terms, the musicians are navigating the potentially turbulent (and sometimes unchartered) waters of improvisation. When it is his or her 'turn' to perform, each individual musician may well select a song or tune from their repertoire that has been practised and members of Sly Old Dogs themselves will draw on a stock of known and established musical arrangements that they have built up over many years of playing together. Nevertheless, the moment of performance is founded on the expectation that other musicians in the room will join in if they feel sufficiently confident; indeed the usual practice for the leading musician to announce the key constitutes an invitation for them to do so. The resulting performance is thus unrehearsed (members of the band jokingly refer to 'practice' as 'the P-word') and a sense of achievement is shared by the musicians when the performance piece is concluded to their – and the audience's – satisfaction and pleasure; the *ad hoc* musical arrangements have worked and everyone has finished at the same time.

The majority of instruments that are present during the Sly Old Dogs sessions – fiddles, banjos, mandolins and (especially) guitars – are capable of being used for complex and expert musical arrangements and there is often a clear perception of skills difference

between the musicians who play them. Nevertheless, with one or two rare exceptions, all instruments can also make a strong contribution to the overall 'community' sound when in the hands of relatively inexperienced or less accomplished musicians. While some guitarists play complex lead breaks, others strum basic chords; while some banjo players apply flailing techniques in accompaniment, others pick out simple melodies, and so on. The capacity of instruments to be played simply but effectively highlights their essential value within an amateur music-making domain. They are not primarily vehicles for virtuoso musical performance; indeed occasions when guest musicians demonstrate adeptness and expertise in their performance, appreciation by fellow participants is often accompanied by good-humoured, self-deprecating banter – 'that's a bit professional for us', 'who's going to follow that?' Musical instruments that can be played simply take on more of a socialising role within the practice of amateur music-making. Shared knowledge of the basic chords and keys, recognition of familiar folk songs and tunes, similar levels of commitment to practising and refining musical skills are the points of commonality and bonding between participants, whether they are well-acquainted with each other or first-time visitors. The presence of these instruments and their use in relatively elementary and uncomplicated musical arrangements constitutes a vital component of the intersubjective experience of amateur musicians playing together socially; their level of performance is valued through their willingness to participate and perform as part of a community.

In her observation of music-making in Milton Keynes, Ruth Finnegan refers to varying 'learning and performance modes' (2007, p.142) attached to different musical instruments and compares their use in both classical and popular music. Rather than classify musical instruments as belonging to either genre, she considers how they represent modes of learning which enable performers to develop skills and achieve musical expression in particular ways: formal (classical) and informal (popular).

> The preponderance of guitars, vocals and percussion in most small bands as against the mix of strings, keyboard, woodwind and brass in classical music sometimes gave rise to the argument that the 'easy' instruments of 'popular music' could be learnt by quick self-taught methods in contrast to the protracted and specialist process necessary for, say, the classical violin. (Finnegan 2007, p.141)

Certainly, any indication of classical training on the part of musicians taking part in Sly Old Dogs and Friends is played down. Musical expertise is attributed to experience in playing in similar sessions combined with self-taught instruction. Notes and crib sheets used by some participants during their performance sometimes contain sequences of chord names but no formal stave notation, or even tablature. Undoubtedly, some of the musicians who attend the sessions are capable of reading stave but none of them 'admits' to this skill within this social, 'amateur' environment. However, Finnegan continues:

> ...it is doubtful if the *instruments* can really explain the different learning modes. It is true that with some instruments players could acquire basic skills for joint playing relatively rapidly (a few rudimentary chords on a guitar, for example, or riffs on a drum), whereas with others the *initial* stages took a long time ... several instruments in fact crossed the 'divide': the classical violin was the same *instrument* as the folk fiddle but with very different conventions for learning and playing... (2007, p.141)

This brings us to the third broad observation of instruments used at Sly Old Dogs and Friends: their association with 'folk' music. Before considering the family of instruments most readily associated with the performance of folk music and the significance of their presence at amateur music-making events, consideration is needed of the dominance of the guitar at such events. Of the twelve musicians who typically and regularly attend Sly Old Dogs and Friends, six (including myself) play guitar, albeit not exclusively; four include guitar in a range of instruments played throughout the evening. An even higher proportion of floor musicians at Warwick Folk Club's performers' nights play guitar and it is not uncommon for standard acoustic guitars to be the only instruments played during The Tump's singers' nights.

While the presence of guitars in cases, on stands or simply propped up against furniture is a clear visual signifier of amateur music-making as a social event, they have not always been so widely accepted at British folk clubs. The popularity of the guitar at British folk clubs, 'open mic' sessions and other informal music-making events – and the significance of the guitar as an object-sign within amateur music discourse – can be explained in some part by reference to historical accounts of the so-called 'folk revival' of the late 1950s and through the 1960s. In his autobiography, the guitarist John Renbourn comments on the resistance to

the instrument by emerging traditional folk clubs in the 1960s, indicating the role of the
guitar in the distinction between 'traditional' and 'contemporary' folk music, discussed in
Chapter 1.1.

> Though the British 'Folk Revival' was underway, most of the clubs had a heavily traditional
> bias and guitar players were often frowned upon. It took the collaboration of Davey Graham
> and Shirley Collins to start to change that, but it was a rocky process. (Renbourn n.d.)

His account refers to the first all-nighter club, Les Cousins, in Greek Street, London, an
influential meeting-place for guitarists and contemporary songwriters as 'people who were
unwelcome in traditional clubs' (*ibid*).

Carole Pegg's overview of the development of folk music in the UK indicates how the
presence and use of musical instruments at a folk event provided a clear indication of the
traditional-contemporary schism of the folk scene in the latter part of the 20th century:

> Contemporary songs, including protest songs or songs about social issues, usually
> accompanied by acoustic guitars, were performed in clubs such as the Troubadour in
> London; traditional songs and melodies, either unaccompanied or accompanied by
> instruments such as fiddles, melodeons, concertinas, tin whistles and pipes, were performed
> in 'traditional' clubs. (Pegg n.d.)

Georgina Boyes comments on the struggle for the guitar to be accepted in some more
traditional folk circles in the 1950 and 60s in which unaccompanied singing was often the
more dominant and normative practice. She refers to the 'privileging of anachronistic styles
of performance and accompaniment', which she asserted were 'applied to English
"traditional" music with a large measure of approval, but few concessions to logic' (Boyes,
p.238). With reference to those clubs which adhered to the 'policy', established in the late
1950s by Ewan MacColl – that singers in folk clubs should limit their repertoire to songs in a
language they spoke or understood (Brocken 2003, p.35)[34] – Boyes observed:

> ... some 'policy clubs' refused to admit musicians who arrived with guitars. In others, a
> gentle hiss went round the room when someone entered carrying a guitar case and they
> were 'encouraged' not to use it. As late as 1984, a band which played entirely 'traditional'

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[34] Brocken states that the establishment of 'policy clubs', alongside Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger's
formation of the Critics' Group (see Chapter 4.3), was a response to the popularity of skiffle and the
perceived threat on British traditional music by American cultural imperialism. (Brocken 2003, pp.34-7)

material encountered objections on 'policy' grounds because they used electronic

instruments. Yet, unaccountably, no 'policy clubs' seemed to have refused to accept a

performer who sang with concertina accompaniment. The concertina was, after all,

'authentic' – old(ish), used by the Folk (sometimes) and, most of all, unsullied by modernity.

(Boyes 1994, p.238)

Nevertheless, many British folk clubs throughout the 1960s witnessed a growth in popularity

of the guitar as a melodic instrument, as opposed to its use for strummed, rhythmic

accompaniment. Young predominantly male guitarists developed finger-picking techniques

that were influenced partly by traditional acoustic blues and ragtime guitarists from America

such as Big Bill Broonzy and Mississippi John Hurt, partly by classical sources, ranging from

Elizabethan to flamenco music, and in some cases, scales, riffs and rhythms reflecting jazz

idioms. This emerging style in British folk guitar-playing was described by Robin Denselow as

'folk baroque' (Laing *et al* 1975, p.145) and is characterised by Sweers as:

> a polyphonic texture, often with baroquelike ornaments and grace notes and a playing
>
> technique with inherently percussive and blues-derived elements ... the open tunings
>
> involved a technical simplification for guitarists playing or accompanying these traditional
>
> songs in a style that was focused on melodic rather than chordal thinking. (Sweers 2005,
>
> p.184)

Its most influential exponents included Davy Graham[35] as well as Renbourn and fellow

guitarist and housemate Bert Jansch. Renbourn and Jansch's intricate blues-jazz guitar

arrangements brought a new appeal of traditional songs to younger audiences and they

became co-founders of the British folk group Pentangle, which achieved commercial success

in the late 1960s by combining acoustic guitar with drums and double bass to provide a

distinctive folk-jazz accompaniment to the singing of Jacqui McShee (Patrick 2003, p.781).

Arguably, such use of the guitar as 'baroque' accompaniment to traditional and traditional-

style songs by artists such as Martin Carthy, Jansch and Renbourn, established a momentum

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[35] David Graham's stage name is spelt both as 'Davy' and 'Davey' in different accounts and even on different
album sleeves.

for the instrument's popularity throughout the 1970s and up to the present day, reinvigorating interest in the guitar for subsequent generations of amateur musicians who frequented folk clubs. In my own experience, it is common to witness guitar performances in folk clubs by floor artists inspired by – and seeking to emulate the arrangements of – guitarists such as the late John Martyn and Nick Drake and renowned musicians currently active on the folk circuit such as Martin Simpson, Dick Gaughan and Paul Brady. Davy Graham's famous instrumental composition *Anji* is still frequently performed by guitar-playing floor musicians while guitar-based songs by American antecedents to the 1960s British folk scene – Reverend Gary Davis's *Candyman* and Elizabeth Cotten's *Freight Train* – are also popular in the repertoires of amateur musicians sharing their guitar-playing expertise.

While the traditional-contemporary divide appears to be less antagonistic in the folk music scene today, the presence of musical instruments at public amateur music events does provide an expectation of styles and modes of performance. Other instruments often played during the Sly Old Dogs and Friends evenings are drawn from specific musical discourses within the folk scene, ranging from acoustic blues and skiffle to traditional English and morris dance tunes. However, dominant among these are instruments associated with traditional Irish music and regular played at pub music sessions – fiddles, mandolin, tin whistles, banjos and bodhráns. Not only do such instruments function as object-signs in their anticipation of an inclusive 'session' style of performance, very much in keeping with the ethos of socialisation associated with informal gatherings of amateur musicians, they also present themselves as symbols of a musical, and national, culture.

Thomas F. Johnston (1995) explores the cultural significance of certain traditional Irish folk instruments and the extent to which they invoke a sense of national identity for – and of empathy with – the Irish as a distinctive ethnic group. He discusses, for example, how the configuration of sounds renders Irish flute playing as 'instantly recognisable' and the capacity of traditional music to evoke feelings of patriotism and national loyalty:

> 19th-century Irish immigrants in America used Irish instrumental music, dance, and song to unify Irish enclaves in New York, Boston, and Chicago. Performances brought back nostalgic memories of idyllic villages nestled in the hills of old Ireland, of long-abandoned farms and

homes, of relatives and friends not seen for decades. But most of all it came to symbolise

Irish ethnic identity and national heritage in the face of a sometimes hostile social ambience

and an alien cultural milieu. (Johnston 1995, p.39)

The bodhrán is also widely associated with Irish cultural history and traditional music, although, as David Such (1985) observes, its dominance in volume and accessibility to relatively unskilled performers have been known to render its inclusion unwelcome in some Irish traditional music sessions:

Musicians or purists who favour the older traditional instruments contend that the influx of

unskilled bodhrán players is detrimental to the music. Such claims are not wholly

unwarranted, for many amateur bodhrán players, indeed, exhibit either the tendency to play

too loudly or stumble over the rhythm. These disputes affect skilled bodhrán players who

are generally sympathetic to such objections; in attempting to join a session they may be

told, 'no bodhráns, please!' by the other musicians. Thus the bodhrán player is sometimes

treated as a performer whose role alongside the other instruments is questionable and

uncertain. (Such 1985, p.16)

No such prohibition exists for the bodhrán at Sly Old Dogs and Friends events. Indeed, its presence contributes not only towards the signification of 'folk authenticity' conveyed by other musical instruments on display but also, alongside the banjo, as a topic of good-natured banter between the musicians and audience. Jokes at the expense of fellow musicians frequently function intersubjectively as a reaffirmation of the group's shared purpose and identity. Bodhráns and banjos make easy substitutes to violas in the jokes cited by Carl Rahkonen (2000) in his discussion of 'joke cycles' which are based on shared beliefs and stereotypes within music communities.

In contrast to 'Irish session' instruments, the concertina (which is occasionally but not frequently featured at Sly Old Dogs and Friends events) has become associated with British and, in particular, English traditional music through its regular use in music sessions, morris dance displays and folk clubs, despite its rather tenuous link with the development of folk music during the first half of the 20th century. Stuart Eydmann (1995) describes its more widespread use in concert halls and music halls in the 19th century and its more marginalised presence in folk music and dance events, despite Cecil Sharp's encounter with

the young concertina-player William Kimber in 1899 accompanying a morris dance performance and its use by Percy Grainger (albeit performed as a classical instrument) in several of his compositions (Eydmann 1995, p.43). Eydmann argues that the 'concertina consciousness' (p.42), which emerged in the mid-1970s and was characterised by the frequent depiction of the instrument in folk music promotion, marked its status as an 'emblem' of the folk revival, more through its symbolism than its historical role:

> The instrument already enjoyed endorsement by Sharp and Grainger, it was British (i.e. non-American) and, most importantly, it was an instrument born in and of the industrial revolution and came laden with working class associations. (Eydmann 1995, p.44)

Similarly the notional link between banjos and bluegrass music, or slide guitars and blues music, signifies a provenance of 'folk' instruments in social history and cultural identity, whether real or imagined. Associations between instruments regularly played at Sly Old Dogs and Friends events and shared conceptions of folk traditions and genres, verify the status of these events as integral to the local folk 'scene' and hence provide a context of expectations for participants in terms of repertoire and style of performance. Combined with this, the acoustic nature of these instruments and their accessibility to amateur musicians with differing levels of performance competence, establishes and reaffirms a shared set of understandings on the types of social interaction that characterise these events: informal, unrehearsed and spontaneous. The location of the instruments, on music stands in front of the performers or casually resting on tables behind them, enable each musician to perform at a moment's notice when invited to do so by the MC, or to join in if he or she recognises a tune or song being performed. Despite the structured nature of the event – the 'evening of three halves' – and the 'prologue' and 'first act' setting-up rituals, referred to at the beginning of this section, the textual theme of the musicking experience is rooted in convivial informality. This is clearly signified through the presence, location and use of musical instruments as object-signs and hence reinforces a sense of identity by participants appropriate to the social situation.

Chapter 4.5: Event formats

While the organisation of time and running orders remains consistent for the monthly Sly Old Dogs and Friends evenings, a variety of formats is applied to the weekly Warwick Folk Club and Tump Folk Club events. I have already highlighted the distinctions between Warwick Folk Club's 'performers' night', 'featured guest night' and 'concert night' formats (pages 117-8) and the three usual formats for The Tump Folk Club of 'singaround', 'singers' night' and 'guest night' (pages 123-4). While the Warwick Folk Club website and The Tump Facebook page do provide statements to indicate the clubs' interpretation of these terms, the presence of these varying formats within the calendar of club events signifies the prevalence of specific forms of interaction, not only for each event but also for the club as an overall social entity. Here I shall make a case for the consideration of individual formats as effective object-signs in the sense that, like inanimate objects and participant roles, they are endowed with specific sets of meaning, understood and shared by participants, through their ascribed modes of structure, ritual and interaction. To demonstrate this, I shall select and expand on two formats: the Tump Folk Club's *singaround* format and Warwick Folk Club's *featured guest night*. In describing and reflecting on these formats as object-signs, I shall reproduce and elaborate on narrative commentaries that I wrote immediately after attending an example of each event during the period of this research.

Singaround at The Tump

Singarounds observed at folk venues generally tend to consist of 'party pieces', offered by each performer, usually while he or she remains seated in a circle. At The Tump Folk Club, performance pieces are usually songs, accompanied on guitar or unaccompanied, but occasionally take the form of instrumental items or even poems or recitations.

The following are extracts from a narrative in which I recorded my experience of a singaround at the Tump that took place in September 2010, and are presented here with

additional comments to reflect on the protocols and conventions which established an agenda of shared meanings and interactions by participants[36].

> Tump singarounds are almost always attended by club regulars who are on first-name terms although occasional strangers are welcomed. Numbers taking part range from five or six slightly embarrassed souls lost in a cavernous room to a somewhat more respectable total of around 15 and most participants are willing - indeed expected - to perform a song, often unaccompanied but usually with guitar backing. Those who don't wish to sing may opt to recite a poem or monologue. And those rare individuals who don't plan to perform in any capacity will simply refuse with a remorseful smile each time it could be construed as 'their turn', or may even try to make themselves inconspicuous by sitting apart from the others, outside the 'circle', an act which ironically makes them stand out more as not fitting in with the social conventions of the evening.

Conventions of turn-taking and polite invitations to offer a performance signify an etiquette which reflects an egalitarian mode of interaction and an acknowledgement that each participant potentially has something to contribute and share. Hence the format stands in contrast to the 'concert' format of singers' and guest nights in which the club organiser assumes, more overtly, the power to determine a running order or indeed the inclusion of any floor singer who may arrive. The running order in a singaround appears to be based more on contingency than agency and hence signals a denial of hierarchy in musical talent or popularity of individual artists. This is discussed in the next section of my account.

> The circular arrangement of seating is what distinguishes the singaround as a specific form of folk club interaction. There is no raised stage area, no public address system, no stage lighting, no anticipated hierarchy of performance where 'lesser mortal' floor singers prepare the ground for the evening's star turn. The circle signifies a community event, in which each member's contribution is valued, with the possibly unfortunate connotation of a group therapy session or corporate team-building gathering.

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[36] See pages 93-4 for discussion on this method of recording research information. Names of participants have been changed in this account.

The account continues with word-portraits of participants who arrive and establish their position – physically and symbolically – within the structured domain, mapped out by the positioning of the furniture.

> At 8pm the regulars start to arrive. Margaret and Linda, two ladies in their late 50s who attend a local church and sing in a folk choir occupy adjacent seats in the circle, the furthest away from Karen (the organiser) but in a position to maintain direct eye contact and conversation with her while others arrive. They're joined by Sally, a woman in her 30s struggling with a guitar case that looks oversized next to her small frame. A primary school teacher by profession, she can be relied on to give eccentric performances of some of her self-penned songs recalling incidents from her childhood and attaching a simple moral to the narrative: cheats never prosper or lies have a way of being found out.
>
> Also armed with guitar, Doug enters the room. A semi-professional musician who augments his living with rock'n'roll gigs, he has built up a following on the local folk circuit for his up-beat performances of popular songs from the 40s, 50s and 60s with jazz chord accompaniment. As probably the most technically competent musician likely to arrive this evening, Doug is approached by Karen who asks him if he is willing to 'host' the evening. The role entails playing the first song and then nodding and smiling at each person in a clockwise direction to confirm that it's their turn to perform. Doug readily accepts the responsibility.

The 'rules of engagement' of singarounds at The Tump are usually applied in the spirit of fair play, often through the designation of one of the performers as 'host' who nominates each performer's turn, sometimes by simply making eye-contact and smiling at that person. Hosts are never 'booked' as guests for the occasion and are rarely invited in advance of the evening. Karen, the organiser, usually waits to see who turns up and then nominates a person she feels is capable of taking on the role – or she occasionally assumes the role herself. The hierarchical distinction between 'host' and other performers taking part is minimal. The 'host' is afforded no privileges or opportunities to perform more songs than the other participants. The role appears to be based on the expediency of facilitation.

> By 8.30pm, a dozen or so people are in place and Doug starts the proceedings with a few brief words of welcome and a jaunty version of *Java Jive*, a song not noted for its place in the repertoires of dedicated bastions of the folk tradition. Next in line is Hamish, a retired

headteacher who adopts a self-deprecating approach to his guitar-playing, apologises in advance, then struggles to produce the chord shapes on the fretboard of his nylon-strung Spanish guitar as he sings his hesitant version of Lennon and McCartney's *Norwegian Wood*.

Sitting next to Hamish is George, the first participant to sing unaccompanied and to select a more authentic 'folk' song, Jez Lowe's *Durham Jail*, which he performs in a slightly out-of-tune vocal style whilst squinting at the tiny print of the lyrics on the open page of a CD booklet.

Margaret, one of the church ladies amuses the circle with her reading of *Matilda Who Told Lies and was Burned to Death*, a Hilaire Belloc cautionary tale for children, printed on a folded sheet of paper extracted from her coat pocket. All faces then turn expectantly to her friend Linda, who smiles and shakes her head, causing the next singer, Brian to feign surprise that it's his turn already, before launching into a lively, percussive guitar accompaniment for his rendition of John Martyn's *May You Never*.

The evident eclecticism in styles and sources of repertoire and modes of performance reinforces the priority, shared by participants, given to the *act* of performance – the contribution of each individual to the collective fulfilment and consummation of an evening of amateur entertainment – over the *content* or genre of material selected for performance and, indeed, the quality of the performance in terms of musical skill.

Each performance by each person is rewarded with an appreciative response of applause and comments: 'nice one', 'very good' and 'well done'. While the applause is discernibly louder and longer for the more accomplished performances, the very act of 'having a go' and sharing a set piece with fellow members of the singaround community warrants appreciation and encouragement. Even when Richie, a nervous, middle-aged blues guitarist has to restart a verse of Reverend Gary Davis's *Cocaine Blues* after being thrown by a fluffed attempt at a fairly complex clawhammer pick, his achievement at reaching the end of the song, muttering the words 'or something like that', is marked by enthusiastic applause and a subdued but unmistakable 'whoop!'

This account also indicates an accommodation of flexibility within the 'rules' of the singaround format. It is not in the power of the 'host' or the intention of the organiser to establish and apply a rigid prescription of expected behaviour by participants. There are no

written notices giving instructions, no exercise of formal sanctions, and no overt indicators of top-down controlling mechanisms other than the social rules of politeness and fairness. Certain anomalies to the singaround format are readily tolerated. It is not uncommon, for example, for participants to perform as duos, but each member of the duo is still invited to have a 'turn' as an individual, accompanied by their partner. Late arrivals are not refused entry into the circle but are instead welcomed as that circle physically changes shape to allow their inclusion.

> The late arrival of Michael, a singer-songwriter and accomplished guitarist, gives rise to the dilemma of where in the circle that he should sit as this could determine how soon he would be performing after his arrival or which performer he would follow. Hamish jokingly offers to swap places with the words, 'I don't want to follow you!'

On some occasions, several participants may arrive late and find themselves unable to fit into the circumference, resulting in the shuffling of chairs to make space, the formation of a 'bulge' or breakaway group or even an outer concentric circle with resultant confusion on whose turn is next to perform. While most participants are willing to conform to the spatial arrangements of the singaround, participants will also tolerate the occasional renegade who insists on sitting outside the circle. This may be a dissenter who is happy to observe but is making clear, from the outset, reluctance to offer a performance, or perhaps a newcomer who may not feel they can impose themselves as part of the established group. Rather than ignore such wayward behaviour, the host may still offer an invitation which may be politely refused or taken up with a show of deference – 'If you're sure that's OK?'

Circumstances do arise where singaround participants agree, usually tacitly, to the rules being broken. These may include the arrival of a musician considered by participants to be more competent than themselves as a performer, such as a professional or semi-professional folk musician. Such a person may be invited to join the circle but be offered an extended 'spot' of three songs, or an opportunity to perform the final 'set' of the evening. This demonstrates, in essence, a return to a more hierarchical format that is capable of offering closure to the evening's narrative by ending the occasion with the shared elation of an accomplished performance.

Being a featured guest at Warwick

Warwick Folk Club's 'Featured Guest Night' format is one borne of experimentation and experience by the organising team but remains close to the more familiar concert night format common to many folk clubs. Having established the title of 'performers night' for club nights featuring local floor acts, as an alternative to the usual folk club terminology of 'singers night' (see page 116), the organisers scheduled some of these in the club's calendar as 'Performers Night featuring...' in which a selected and named local guest act would be given an extended spot beyond the standard 'two songs or ten minutes' floor spot. According to the club organiser, Norman Wheatley, this reflected the club's attempt to bridge a perceived gap between 'free for all' singers nights and guest nights by providing audiences with a chance to enjoy an extended performance from an act from within the local 'folk scene' plus an opportunity for local acts to take on a 'guest' role in front of a familiar audience and to develop more fully their repertoire and performance:

> ...we've tried a couple of times to put on a showcase where people who you wouldn't necessarily book as a main guest do twenty minutes to half an hour... There are some clubs in the area who just don't give those opportunities to local guests. Somehow or other, I managed to get bookings in the local area some couple of years after I had started playing. I'm not entirely sure how, now that I look back on it, but these smaller clubs were willing to give the opportunity to someone who had only been playing a short while. If you're doing it at the basic level, yes you can turn up and just do a song – that's partly what folk clubs are about. But I think you ought to be able to do it on the slightly next level where you get paid for it. (Norman Wheatley – Warwick Folk Club)

The 'Featured Guest Night' format was introduced by the club in 2011 to replace nights billed as the 'Performers Night featuring...' to indicate a clearer distinction from the 'come all ye' approach of the standard 'Performers Night'. They feature two guest acts, both from the local folk circuit. The 'main' guest act performs two 30-minute sets at the end of each half of the evening's schedule. The other guest is described by the club as the 'opening act', rather than 'support act', and is invited to perform two 20-minute sets, one in each half. This act is selected on the basis that their music is complementary to the featured guest and would appeal to a similar audience. The evening is hosted by one of the artists who appear

regularly as MCs for the club and it is, in fact, this person who 'opens' the evening with a short set of two or three songs before the billed 'opening act' performs their first set. The MC also supervises the drawing of the raffle before the featured guest act's final set and hands over the prize (usually a CD recording) to the holder of the winning ticket.

To illustrate the characteristics of this format as an object-sign, I shall again present extracts from a narrative account that I wrote after one such evening, 12th March 2012, when one of the bands that I play for, BorderLine Crossing was booked as the main guest for the evening.[37] The opening act was a singer and guitarist who is fairly active on the Warwickshire folk circuit, Colin Squire, and the MC for the evening was Bill Bates, another local singer and guitarist who specialises in self-composed comedy songs and often appears as a local club guest in his own right.

In contrast to The Tump's singaround, the more formalised arrangement at Warwick Folk Club required early arrival and advance preparation.

> Norman has told us that he wants to start the evening at 8pm promptly and all four of us arrive in my car at 7.20pm, following his warning that parking in Warwick can be a nightmare even at that time of day. It's just as well we're not bringing our PA. The car is packed with instruments – two guitars each for me and Dave, Pete's bass (with his small portable amplifier – absolutely vital for a balanced sound), Chele's music stand and our instrument stands. By the time we struggle into the club room and start setting up, it is almost 7.30pm.
>
> We have a brief discussion on who is positioned where in the 'stage' area. We all plan to be seated when we perform and needed to have furniture on stage ready for when we're called up. Dave is adamant that he needs to see what I'm playing and that Chele should sit between us. He finds it off-putting for the bass to be too close to him when he is trying to follow my rhythm guitar-playing and asks for Pete to sit next to me, away from him. We find a high stool for Chele and chairs for the rest of us. Then we tune our instruments and set them up on their stands before placing our chairs and instruments against the wall at the

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[37] BorderLine Crossing is an acoustic folk-blues band that has performed with varying line-ups at folk clubs and festivals in Coventry and Warwickshire since 2010. Its current line-up (which performed at the event described here) comprises: Chele Willow (vocals), Dave Cook (lead and slide guitar), Pete Townsend (bass) and myself (guitar and vocals).

back of the stage. Norman has provided a small, square collapsible table 'for artists' drinks' and this is positioned in the middle of the stage area, next to where Chele will sing. I assemble her music stand and position it to one side so that it is ready to use when we are called up for our first set. During this time, Norman has a selection of ambient music playing through his iPod, but he turns this off while we are tuning up. I think he would have preferred us to have turned up earlier, as the sight and sound of three musicians tuning up onstage looks a bit messy to the arriving audience. This is not like the orchestra in the pit and I know that Norman would have chosen the ambient music especially to set the tone for the evening.

In effect, our setting-up ritual functioned, in dramaturgical terms, as the 'first act' rather than a 'prologue' or 'backstage' preparation. Our interaction and tuning-up activities on the stage area, while laying the groundwork for the more ceremonial format of the performance to follow, was in full view of arriving audience members and thus negated the potential impact of an empty stage area, with instruments already lined up, to presage a more formalised evening of musical entertainment. This was exacerbated by the arrival of the opening guest singer and the MC, both of whom were personal friends of the band's members, so that greeting rituals of handshakes and hugs took place in front of the audience. We had, to borrow Goffman's terminology, removed the opportunity for the club to separate out 'back region' and 'front region' activity:

> There will be a back region with its tools for shaping the body, and a front region with its fixed props. There will be a team of persons whose activities on stage in conjunction with available props will constitute the scene from which the performed character's self will emerge, and another team, the audience, whose interpretive activity will be necessary for this emergence. (Goffman 1959, p.253)

The furniture on stage and the tuned instruments on their stands functioned as the props but the pre-determined format of the evening, as a sign-vehicle, had been intended to create 'regions' in time rather than space. Ideally, the informal setting-up would have occurred during a time period prior to the arrival of audience members and thus away from their field of perception. The fact that Norman decided to turn off the recorded music on his iPod, which had been timed to end at 8pm when the live 'show' was due to start, demonstrated his acceptance that informal social interaction between guest performers

would take precedence over the more structured and staged experience that had been planned to establish the character of the evening.

The point at which the first half of the planned entertainment would begin marked a significant change in the mode of interaction from a series of fragmented social performances across the room – conversations between friends, transactions at the door, and so on – to a more structured and inclusive mode of communication in which the MC 'took charge' and presented himself as the focus and guide for the evening's presentation. To emphasise the pre-planned nature of the occasion, in contrast to the more spontaneous character of a Performer's Night, the MC spoke a few words of anticipation of the forthcoming guests before establishing the tone of the evening with two songs from his own repertoire. My account continues:

> I'm wondering if Bill will regale us with some of his comedy material but instead he presents his renditions of *Banks Of The Ohio* and Paul Simon's *Mrs Robinson* – pretty competent arrangements for both. I notice Dave is sitting on the edge of his seat as he'd jammed along with a verse of *Ohio* while Bill was setting up. I think he half-expects Bill to call him up on stage to join in. But Bill is playing it solo.

From the moment that the MC had started the show, the stage area had become prohibited territory to all but the guests and then only when they were invited to step into that territory. Dave might not have felt inhibited about playing slide guitar over Bill's performance in a singaround format but the more formalised structure that was now in place, and the power that this granted Bill in his MC role, signalled that Dave's 'jamming along' with Bill's pre-rehearsed arrangement of the song would have been inappropriate.

> Bill hands over to Colin, who looks relaxed, standing in the middle of the stage and singing to some fast, finger-picking guitar accompaniment. He sings the Patrick Sky song, *Many A Mile*, which has a simple chorus prompting some half-hearted singing by some of the audience (it's still too early to be raucous!). He also includes a song I've not heard before about the 'real' Dick Turpin. I've noticed that Colin has a stock of introductions as well as songs. He quite often tells the story of the song before singing it and his intro's are as much a part of the song as the lyrics themselves.

Again, the more formal and structured format indicated a specific mode of communication; Colin may have been on first-name terms with many of the audience members but, in this circumstance, adopted a more presentational and didactic role in his performance.

> His first set goes down well – that's pressure on us to keep up the momentum of the evening. We don't have a lot of time to get on stage while Bill is introducing us. It includes some banter with jokey comments about my Facebook activity. We still have to put our drinks on the stage table, move the music stand centre stage, move our chairs and instruments forward, sort out our flat-picks, capos and other sundry equipment, while Bill keeps talking, eyeing us carefully, before winding up the chat with 'Ladies and Gentlemen – please welcome BorderLine Crossing!'

Again, participants have witnessed a blurring between preparation and formal performance. Our willingness to comply with the 'concert style' format meant that we had to work swiftly to set up before playing the opening note of our first song. For that short time, our 'back region' activity was exposed; the format drew on expectations of a 'polished' and staged performance but there was no proscenium arch, no wings, no curtain, requiring our final 'setting up' activities effectively to form part of the public 'performance'. During this brief period, we engaged in some good-natured exchanges with the MC while settling ourselves down, but the emphasis was on swiftness and not 'losing' the audience. After a few seconds, an exchange of eye-contact and nods enabled the MC to make the formal announcement, a cue for audience applause and the beginning of our set.

These extracts indicate how the object-sign of format combines with those of props and personal roles to build up a more complex and intra-referential system of signs that establish the appropriate modes of interaction and role identity. The rationale behind the 'Featured Guest Night' format, to provide opportunities for local acts to perform extended, concert-style sets to local audiences, encouraged on this occasion a more scripted and 'theatrical' approach to the band's performance. The running order had been determined in advance, rehearsed and timed. Decisions had been made on how songs would be introduced, which band members would introduce them, or indeed which songs would be launched without any introduction but immediately after audience applause. Factors behind our choice and

order of songs had included variations in keys and tempos, so that each of the two sets would constitute its own narrative, within the broader narrative structure of the evening's format, starting with a lively, up-tempo arrangement and finishing with a well-known song that would highlight the distinctive feature of the band, Chele's vocal style, while encouraging audience members to sing along – in our case, the Sam Cook composition *Bring It On Home To Me*.

While recognising how participants' shared readings and expectations are signalled by specific formats, it is also notable how the presence – or lack – of variety in formats constitutes a meta-narrative for the mode of experience that musicians and audiences may anticipate when engaging with particular folk clubs. While Sly Old Dogs and Friends offers a consistent format, as a framework for the style of interactions and performances that have been developed through custom and practice, the distinction between clearly defined formats offered by Warwick and The Tump folk clubs establish these organisations as domains within which amateur musicians and folk fans may interact but in accordance with varying rule sets and rituals. Space is given for different forms of musical interaction and engagement, from the informal and communal sharing of repertoires to the formalised role-play of a hierarchical, 'professional' show or spectacle for audience entertainment. The charging of admission and the payment of expenses and nominal fees to otherwise 'amateur' guest acts signifies a more contractual relationship, temporarily established for the fabricated 'experience', staged by the club through its presentation of known locals as 'star attractions' for the evening. I will return to this point in Chapter 4.7.

Chapter 4.6: Repertoires, styles and practices

While Small's concept of 'musicking' may be applied in broad terms to cover all behaviours and interactions associated with a music event (including attending the event in the first place), focus on those musicking practices which may be described as performance-related is pertinent to this study. These practices include audience participation in the form of chorus singing, harmony singing, providing improvised musical accompaniment or 'jamming', heckling or engaging in banter with performers, and responding through applause, laughter, or other forms of emotive behaviour directly related to the musical performance. Performance practices adopted by musicians themselves also fit into this category of object-sign; examples are unaccompanied singing, solo, duo or band performances, incorporation of comedy or engaging in dialogue with audience members. Such practices may be rehearsed or, as is often the case for amateur musicians, less demonstrative and sometimes more self-deprecating, even to the point of apologetic for errors and omissions in the performance.

A descriptive account of a night out in a folk club may identify and quantify a range of such practices as characteristic of such an event, but interpretation of them as object-signs provides further evidence of their role in establishing a domain of intersubjectivity. As practices, i.e. social performances in the strict dramaturgical sense, they may be considered as a presentation of 'sign-vehicles' (Goffman 1959) through which expression is 'given' as purposeful communication and 'given off' as impressions created in the minds of observers and witnesses (1959, pp.13-14; see also Goffman 1963, p.13). Thus sign-vehicles appear to convey performative messages appropriate to the social situation and, in this sense, the folk club provides the setting within which audience members perform their *roles as spectators* and musicians perform their *roles as entertainers*. However, taking this observation beyond descriptive metaphor requires recognition of the capacity of such performative actions to create a social bonding based on the sharing of meanings, within which each performer does not simply 'take on' a role as a mantle, but acquires and becomes immersed in an identity which feels credible and authentic within this domain. Such a phenomenon may be distinguished from Goffman's concept of 'role-play' as a staged form of social behaviour, as

described in *The Presentation of Self*, and regarded more usefully as an intersubjective response to the social situation, closer in fact to Goffman's use of the term 'embracement':

> To embrace a role is to disappear completely into the virtual self available in the situation, to be fully seen in terms of the image, and to confirm expressively one's acceptance of it. To embrace a role is to be embraced by it. (Goffman 1961b, p.106)

Observation of all three case study folk clubs produces a rich array of performance behaviours that may be treated as evidence of such immersion into role and identity. As a means of gaining insight into these as significant and integral to amateur music discourse, it is useful to consider them within two categories: *musicking practice* and *repertoires and style*.

Musicking practice refers us to the types of behaviour exhibited by those present to signify their active and willing participation in the music event. The significance of such behavioural acts is their capacity to function, quite literally, as instances of symbolic interaction. In performing their anticipated and appropriate roles, participants not only 'embrace' the social situation but signal clearly to their fellow participants the extent of their disposition and allegiance to these roles. Individual identities, which may prevail outside the domain of the folk club, become subsumed, to varying degrees, by a collective or communal identity, instigated by the presence of – and participants' readings of – the object-signs of the event, while simultaneously framing performative behaviours and interactions which, in themselves, function as object-signs and reaffirm the discursive character of the occasion. Music and its performance takes 'centre stage', literally and figuratively. It is not simply the *raison d'être* for the event but the focus of engagement, immersion and shared sense of empathy, seeking precedence over other terms of reference which may otherwise determine interactive relationships, such as age, social class, profession, and so on.

This is not a simplistic process of assimilation and does necessitate some degree of negotiation on the part of participants, especially as some participants, especially first-time visitors, may perceive an element of ambiguity in the 'rules of engagement' or a deviation, by individual folk clubs, from shared and standard expectations of behaviour and routine, for example in formats of singarounds or procedures for 'signing in' as a floor singer.

Nevertheless, folk club regulars do anticipate and expect certain 'ground rules' in behaviour, and precedents for this to be set by club organisers. This is illustrated in some of the responses to my social media survey question on aspects in the organisation of the club that make it 'a good night out' (*Appendix C*):

> The first thing that we liked about Northwich Folk Club on our first visit over 17 years ago was that someone came over and spoke to us and not just at the end and not just to sell raffle tickets. That first good impression made us want to come back.

> I have seen a bad atmosphere develop in some venues when time has simply run out and musicians that were promised a floor spot have not had the opportunity to play. This is very often because selfish or inexperienced musicians early in the evening have overrun their allocated time (often the verbal intro to a song is longer than song itself!) and the wishy washy organiser has not had the nerve or common sense to ask them to finish up.

> Organisers need to have rules. Acts should have to ask to perform in advance, audiences to be reminded not to chat/walk out in the middle of the song. (Facebook Survey 2)

As a category of object-sign, musicking practice incorporates all forms of behavioural display, by audience members, musicians, organisers and indeed bar staff, which may be observed, interpreted and responded to, according to a shared understanding of their meaningfulness within the interactive situation. In discursive terms, specific actions may be explained as illustrations of power and compliance within a social system, such as not talking or entering or leaving the room during a musical performance, applauding politely after a poorly executed performance, or waiting patiently for an invitation to perform within the equitable terms of turn-taking. However, in this analysis, it is the practices themselves, and the meanings associated with them, that provide a reaffirmation of identity for participants and the group whose presence constitutes a cohesive social experience of the music-making domain. It is not sufficient for this analysis to reduce such an experience to a set of shared rules and pressures to conform, but to recognise the symbolic nature of each instance of interactive behaviour whereby 'rules' are interpreted, negotiated and sometimes broken in ways that can enhance, rather than detract from, the experience of collective identity. Among the many examples witnessed at the case study clubs are the determined stance of an unaccompanied solo singer in front of the PA system

to establish a closer proximity and empathy with the audience, or a floor singer's use of ironic parody of traditional singing for comic effect through exaggerated vocal intonation and finger-in-the-ear gesture.

Repertoires and style is a relevant sub-category in the analysis of performance as evidence of musicians' choices and preparation of material that is deemed appropriate and likely to be popular. As discussed in the characterisations of the case study clubs (Chapters 3.1 to 3.3), there is a remarkable degree of tolerance at many folk clubs and festivals as to what constitutes 'folk' music and it is useful at this point to consider the longstanding and seemingly engrained conceptual dichotomy in folk discourse: that of 'traditional' and 'contemporary' folk music. As I discussed earlier (pages 33 and 175), this distinction harks back to a division, to the point of tension, that appeared to develop in the English folk scene in the 1960s to 1970s between followers and fans of blues, American and skiffle music and adherents of 'authentic' English traditional music, enjoying a revival in its popularity during this period of time (see MacKinnon 1993, p.29). A number of factors have emerged in the last three decades which have to some degree diffused this tension: in particular the emergence of folk-rock as a distinctive if hybrid generic form (Sweers 2005; Burns 2012) and the growth in popularity of folk festivals which have sought to broaden their market base through a more eclectic range of guest musicians, facilitating greater exposure of traditional folk fans to contemporary music and *vice versa* (Burns 2012, pp.34-5). Currently, the terms 'traditional' or 'trad.' and 'contemporary' take on a more descriptive role in folk-related promotional and media texts of classifying musical styles or genre classifications; for example, modern singer-songwriters may still be described as writing and performing in a 'traditional idiom'. In a literal sense, the term 'contemporary' could also be regarded as a misnomer in its application to music by named composers as far back as the early 20th century.

Sub-generic forms of traditional music may refer to source (English traditional, Irish, Scottish, Celtic, etc.), provenance (for example, 'ancient ballads' or Child ballads, collected and preserved by Francis James Child), or stylistic convention (bluegrass, Americana, ragtime, shanty singing, etc.). Similarly, sub-genres of contemporary music may refer to composers (for example, Bob Dylan, Ralph McTell, John Tams; there is an extensive

pantheon of songwriters whose output is regarded within the folk community as acceptable and fitting for folk club performances), or styles or fusions, such as folk-blues, folk-jazz. 'Traditional' and 'contemporary' may also be applied as shorthand terms to musical treatment or arrangement of songs and tunes.

The value of identifying styles appropriate to amateur music events does not lie in the production of a comprehensive list of genres, especially as many 'folk' clubs demonstrate a liberal attitude to the repertoires of their performers. They nevertheless serve as a useful source of object-signs through their value as reference points for participants of such events, providing *portmanteau* descriptors for types of music performance anticipated or deemed appropriate for any given venue, or indeed performer (see Hield 2010, pp.44-55). But this is only part of the value of object-sign analysis. Not only do styles and repertoires confirm audience expectations but they also serve, in my contention, an important discursive function in the same way that I have described for musicking practices; they draw the audience into a world in which they convey and reaffirm, as object-signs, a sense of collective identity through participants' mutual and shared recognition of their own specificity.

This may constitute a mode of experience for participants that is distinctive and, in some cases, radically different from their perspectives and interpretations in other discursive situations outside the folk club. One illustration of this is regularly observed at the Sly Old Dogs and Friends events when the lyrics of songs occasionally performed convey sentiments (socially or politically) which ostensibly stand in contrast to the beliefs, perspectives and lifestyles of many of the participants. Audience members enthusiastically join in and even harmonise with the chorus when Sly Old Dogs perform *Rolling Home*, a John Tams composition which glorifies and offers hope to 'poor weary labourers' with a strong socialist message: 'Fair wages now and ever, let's reap what we have sown' (Tams 1987). Another popular inclusion in Sly Old Dogs' repertoire is Leon Rosselson's *The World Turned Upside Down*, which describes the fate of the Diggers' commune after their stance against private land ownership in 1649 (Rosselson 1981). Songs of this nature reflect the association of folk music with radicalism, through the American 'protest song' movement (Reuss and Reuss 2000) and the collection and reproduction of songs reflecting working class experience of

poverty, hardship and exploitation in the industrial age, for example by A.L.Lloyd and Ewan McColl in the 1940s and 1950s (Boyes 1993, p.214). Niall MacKinnon's survey of folk club audiences in 1993 indicated greater leaning towards the political left than the overall population of Great Britain (MacKinnon 1993, p.142) but while no such detailed survey has been undertaken for this research, it is significant that the audience profile for Sly Old Dogs events is largely middle-class and includes regular participants who own land, property and businesses. The political message of such songs appears to be secondary to their capacity to invite audience participation through their musical qualities of melody, rhythm, catchy repetitive chorus and refrains.

Style and repertoire are central to Allan Moore's attempt to identify a 'folk aesthetic' (2009), a concept which offers potential for exploring and explaining the discourse inhabited by folk performers and their audiences. He observes that dominant scholarship in contemporary folk music 'concentrates either on identifying music material used, its origins and evolution, or on its social function and meaning' (2009, p.293). Arguably, this chapter of my research has indicated that consideration of music performance as cultural practice, within the context of a folk club as a social and symbolically interactive event, offers insights into the role and impact of repertoires and styles on the intersubjective experience of participants. As object-signs they signify a mode of interaction and experience that is symbolically and aesthetically driven and hence reaffirms, at a personal level, the shape and character of participants' engagement with the music produced and shared. Moore reflects on the rarity of studies into performance practice and cites Ginette Dunn's (1980) analysis of singing traditions in Suffolk as one that has delineated characteristics of 'folk' performance that would distinguish it from the aesthetics of rock, jazz or pop. He proposes a dominant characterisation of the 'folk aesthetic' as:

> ...for singers to express themselves through the songs they sing, to use their performance perhaps to highlight moments in the plot, but not to illustrate them. The singer is the vehicle through which the song speaks, rather than vice versa (Moore 2009, p.298).

Moore seems to be making a case, at least for traditional folk singing, that this aesthetic implies a performance which enables audiences to engage with the song as an authentic experience *facilitated by* the performer, more than the virtuosity of the performer herself.

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My own observations of folk clubs suggest that audiences do appreciate virtuosity as much as they do the communal experience of sharing music. Nevertheless, an understanding of musicians' and audiences' mode of engagement, their participation within folk or amateur music discourse, is more achievable through recognition of how they actively construct meanings of performance practices, styles and repertoires, rather than a characterisation of the music-making event as fulfilling the generic and formal conventions of 'folk' through a handed-down menu of songs, tunes and modes of performance.

Chapter 4.7: Economic relationships

While it may appear incongruous to consider aspects of financial exchange as part of an analysis of 'amateur' music-making, the issue of commodity value is nevertheless significant when identifying structures of meaning within such an environment. In post-industrial capitalism, the commodification of object-signs may be regarded as an inevitable driving force in intersubjective behaviour and manifests itself in numerous obvious ways in a folk club: for example, through the sale of performers' CD recordings or through the conceptual distinction between paid guest artist and floor singer. The folk club is as much a site of political-economic relationships as any cultural institution and the impact of marketisation on culture is regarded with concern by Norman Fairclough (1995):

> One feature of Thatcherism in Britain and parallel political regimes in other countries is that more and more domains of social life have been forced to operate on a more explicitly market basis – educational institutions including schools and universities, the health service, and sections of the arts amongst them. Economic change has been accompanied by cultural change... (Fairclough 1995, p.11)

While such market-based relationships may be discerned within the domain of a folk club, the 'playing down' of economic determinism is fundamental to its ethos, not simply through the club's status as a setting for *amateur* (as in 'non paid') performance but, more broadly, through its focus on music less as a commodity, more as a social bond. Jason Toynbee uses the term 'proto-market' to indicate that performer-audience relationships at localised or amateur music events are not fully commodified:

> Commodity exchange does go on in cases like these. Records are bought and sold, audiences pay to enter clubs and pub back rooms. But the defining characteristic of the proto-market is that the level of activity cannot be explained by economic factors alone. People are engaged in music-making sometimes for the love of it, sometimes for the esteem and sometimes because they expect in the future to enter the music industry proper. (Toynbee 2000, p.27)

The *Folk 21* support organisation for folk clubs who book guests does advocate the establishment of a pricing policy, arguing that '(t)he world of retail has many lessons to teach in this area, and most are transferrable to the world of folk clubs' (Alcock *et al* 2011, p.2). However, it is unusual for participants at folk clubs to see the event as a 'business' or

indeed as a viable business concern. Many are more comfortably positioned as 'members' rather than 'consumers' and payment for admission and raffle draws is regarded as necessary to support the club, not as a contribution to profits.

While the management of Warwick Folk Club does include the handling of finances, the organisers do not regard this as a business operation or as a means of making a profit. Their 'business model' is 'Don't lose money over too long a period' and any 'surplus' (organiser, Norman Wheatley prefers this term to 'profit') is built up in a kitty to cover the expense of booking national artists for their concert nights. The club's income is derived solely from admission charges and raffle income; the club's expenses include artist fees, advertising, printing costs and raffle prizes. In financial terms, the organisers see their objectives as 'breaking even' to ensure the club's continued survival. The motivation to stage a social event around the performance of live music overrides that of deriving personal income or of expansion of the club itself.

Norman's explanation of Warwick Folk Club's financial arrangements offers a typical illustration of a club's self-perception as a non-profit organisation:

> It just exists to cover its costs. Sometimes we only book a guest when we've got enough money to book a guest. It's a great way of doing it. … Lately, because of financial constraints, we've had fewer and fewer of the more expensive, nationally-known guests. If they brought in the numbers, we'd have them happily. We are not out in any way to make money. In fact, probably at the folk club we *shouldn't* make money but we're also not in the business of losing money. If we can take in on the door what we need to pay to a guest and cover the other ancillary expenses – absolutely fine, not a problem. And you've got to have a certain reserve in hand for the nights when you don't sell as many tickets on the door and you've still got to pay the guest, unless you've got an agreement with them that they'll do it for the door, which some surprisingly will still do. They know that's the way it is and then it's down to how much they draw. (Norman Wheatley – Warwick Folk Club)

For the organiser of The Tump Folk Club, the handling and exchange of money is primarily a means to the continuation and survival of the club – and is not an end in itself. She makes the simple distinction between 'guest' artists, who expect payment and floor singers, support acts, guest MCs and singaround participants who do not, but are motivated by the

opportunity to participate. Like most folk club organisers, she books guests within her budget, often relying on their willingness to appear for a guaranteed minimum fee against a percentage of door takings. On this basis, she applies a very basic system of collecting, storing and distributing cash:

> Originally the club's income was from a jug collection. We had a separate jug for the artist and for the raffle - we actually still have separate collections. And over the years I started charging a set admission so I could pay a hundred pound guarantee to guest artists, if they play the full two 40 minutes, against 80% of the door. So if only four people show up, the guest still goes away with the money. The singarounds subsidise the guest nights. All the money goes into one pot. (Karen Orgill – The Tump Folk Club)

While Warwick Folk Club is also able to count on unpaid support from volunteers and regulars, an element of financial exchange forms part of its relationships with performers other than main guests, such as guest MCs and support acts:

> We give them a certain amount of expenses, yes. We give them about a tenner. That's the least we can do – genuinely do! For petrol and a beer – so they're not out of pocket, when we're inviting people in from outside. (Norman – Warwick Folk Club)

The concept of 'value for money' is important to many folk club regulars, despite recognition of the essential elements of volunteerism by organisers and helpers, along with support for no expected financial return by regular floor singers and helpers. There appears to be a tipping point, whereby an expectation of professionalism by guest artists (and the organisation of the club itself) is established when admission is charged at a particular rate to cover the guest's appearance fee. As indicated by Hamish Currie, the higher the admission charged, the more likely audience members are to adopt the role of 'customer' rather than 'participant' with associated expectations of musical quality and accordance with a 'professional' experience: 'Once you start charging people money to get in the whole thing changes. There is then an obligation to provide people with what they will accept as value for their money' (Currie, n.d.). This is borne out by respondent comments in my social media survey on the importance of the standard of music for an enjoyable night out at a folk club:

> Having worked professionally as a singer (not on folk scene) I do expect to see a higher standard of performance at a folk club from a 'guest' - particularly if I know the guest is

being paid to perform; if my expectations are not met I feel quite irritated. (Facebook Survey 1)

I myself am very tolerant of truly dreadful performances from the floor (I haven't worked out why) but not from booked guests. I think we all recognise the possibility of some tension between the wish to provide a good evening of entertainment at one's folk club and maintaining a policy of openness to all comers. In the end we should remember the important point that (usually) people pay to come in. (Facebook Survey 1)

Other respondents recognise how a level of performance quality may be associated with admission charges but profess not to regard this as the only return anticipated from their 'investment':

No one wants to pay £10 then sit through half an hour of mediocrity (or worse) but what I find mediocre another may thoroughly enjoy. For singer's nights, I don't expect quality - but I do expect commitment. Even the poorest performers deserve respect as long as they are doing their best to give a performance. (Facebook Survey 1)

Generally the level of expertise in the entertainment dept. is linked to the price of entry to the venue. I think that folk audiences are more tolerant of widely varying standards - try listening to a 'popular-trio' in a crowded pub. (Facebook Survey 1)

These points are developed in other responses which differentiate between audience expectations of a folk 'club' as a social event and a 'paid gig' as an entertainment:

Folk clubs are for having fun; play your favourites and practice new ones, jam with others, have a great experience. Gigs are for entertaining, putting all that experience and practice into expressing yourself and your music. That's my non-serious view; no-one wants to pay for a gig only to see the performer pissed and flapping around, forgetting words etc. (Facebook Survey 1)

There are some wonderful acoustic performers about (who might have been suitable for work in the folk world a few years back) now pursuing careers in mainstream music. I'd rather spend more money on quality. Last concert - December - world class musician at Birmingham Town Hall with excellent support all for a cheeky £20! A lot less than some of the 'folk acts' even they offer - and a real show of talent from a true world class entertainer. (Facebook Survey 1)

Audience interpretation of folk club formats includes an expectation of a greater sense of 'professionalism' and organisation at guest nights, in comparison with singers' nights or singarounds, something that is 'paid for' through a higher admission charge. Folk club organisers seek to respond to the demand for 'professionalism' by formatting the event in a manner more similar to a formal concert, for example through arrangement of furniture, pre-booking of a skilled MC and support act and restrictions on floor singers. People who have attended the less formal singarounds as participants are treated more as 'paying customers' at guest nights and the experience of the latter event is thus staged and choreographed in a different way. The organiser of The Tump Folk Club bases her approach partly on poor experience of other venues:

> One club would have a lot of floor spots when the people would come to see the guests – I
> mean the organiser was right in a way that it's nice for the people who support the club and
> sing to have their chance but often he wouldn't put the guest on in the second half until
> quite late. It would be a shorter spot and you'd feel short-changed really. (Karen Orgill – The
> Tump Folk Club)

When no paid guests have been booked, the practice of charging a sometimes nominal admission carries different connotations which supersede the purchase of a commodified entertainment experience. Participants' (including floor singers') willingness to contribute to club funds by paying admission for singarounds and singers nights, and buying raffle tickets, signals primarily their support for the club as a provider of a regular opportunity to interact and share music. The organiser's table at the door and cash box on the table, plus the discretely displayed notices of what is being charged on that particular evening, constitute a metaphorical threshold to the interactive domain. The lack of physical barrier or printed tickets and pass-out stamps (at least in the clubs observed as case studies for this research) conveys trust that those who take part are accepting the responsibility, incumbent in their roles, to support the club's welfare as contributors as well as performers.

At certain points of a typical evening, usually the interval or the aftermath of a guest act's final set, the folk club territory becomes a marketplace, not only for the sale of raffle tickets but also for merchandising. Permission for guest musicians to sell CDs and other wares

(printed t-shirts, books, posters, etc.) is usually taken as granted at folk clubs, often as a compensatory opportunity for the artists to boost the modest income gained from their performance fee. Unlike the 'professional' setting of a concert hall or music festival, most folk clubs do not charge commission for merchandising and it is standard practice for touring guest acts to include a track (or several) from their latest CD as part of their repertoire. Ploys are often used by guest acts to 'advertise' the CDs in a manner appropriate to a non-commercial environment, sometimes by playing down the economic basis of their relationships with audiences (for example, Tump Folk Club guest artist, Lucy Ward's invitation to 'come and say hello during the interval – you don't have to buy a CD'), and sometimes by humorous parody of 'hard sell' (for example, the frequently repeated question asked by Sly Old Dogs member, Bob Brooker to his regular audience 'did I tell you I've got some CDs for sale?').

It is increasingly common practice for guest acts to use a portable display case for merchandising, which is opened up and presented on a space provided by the venue, and for this space to become a focal point of conversation between and after periods of live music performance. This points to the question of whether social interaction at folk clubs is motivated and structured by economic exchange within promotional culture or whether specific economic transactions at folk clubs provide stimulus for interaction, whereby interlocutors ironically 'adopt' roles of 'seller' and 'consumer' to establish a communicative relationship.

My observations of the case study folk clubs – and indeed many folk clubs visited in a lifetime – suggests the practice of 'acting the role' applies as much to relationships, apparently based on economic transactions at folk clubs, as it does to the performer-audience relationship discussed in Chapter 4.3.

Chapter 4.8: Object-sign analysis – some conclusions

While the purpose of the analysis in this chapter is to open up and consider indicators of practice which reveal insights into amateur music discourse in folk clubs, I acknowledge at this point that the focus so far is on intersubjectivity. Hence emphasis has been placed on the ways in which folk club participants appear to produce and share meanings actively and interactively through their readings of – and engagement with – object-signs, which enable them to define the situation and their identities within it. I have argued that this approach, reflecting the methodology of symbolic interactionism, is capable of facilitating a more structured form of critical discourse analysis through its attempt to identify, albeit selectively, the ways in which object-signs appear to be perceived and understood by participants as a fundamental quality and condition of their intersubjective experience.

Nevertheless the concentration on such experience, afforded by this analysis, could imply a greater element of 'free will' on the part of musicians and audiences in the construction of meaning than is realistic or fitting when considering amateur music discourse in the Foucauldian sense. The readings and interpretations made by subjects in any given social situation cannot be adequately considered as discursive practices without taking into account a perspective of interactive behaviours – and people's own sense of individuality – as manifestations of prevailing power relations.

In a discussion on how power may be treated as instrumental in the transformation of human beings into subjects, Foucault states, '(t)he exercise of power is not simply a relationship between partners, individual or collective; it is a way in which certain actions modify others' (Foucault 1982, p.788). In his formulation, it is regarded as a practice which effectively creates a 'regime of truth' (*régime du savoir*) (Foucault 1980, p.131) setting out a definition of a society's framework of beliefs and values. It is through this regime that the specificity of individual identity and experience is established, providing evidence of a form of power which:

> ... applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorizes the individual, marks him by his
>
> own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he

must recognize and which others have to recognize in him. It is a form of power which makes individuals subjects. (Foucault 1982, p.781)

Foucault further argues for a conceptual distinction between power relations and relationships of communication whereby information is transmitted and exchanged through a system of signs (p.786). While these may be reciprocal relationships in the determination of human knowledge, the distinction indicates that power is not simply a product of communication and that we are not, as human beings, necessarily subjugated by sign systems. For the purposes of this study, this reminds us that the identification and interpretation of object-signs alone does not constitute an analysis of discourse, without taking into account the nature and impact of prevailing power relationships which may shape the discursive nature of amateur music-making.

In practice, it is virtually impossible to consider object-signs without reference to power relations intrinsic in the meanings that they produce and the analysis offered in this chapter includes inferences to this: for example the differentiation between the skilled 'guest' act and the relatively less competent 'amateur' floor singer, and the positioning of audience members as consumers with demands and expectations, through the charging of admission. However, a more comprehensive appreciation of the role and nature of power relations within amateur music discourse is possible through consideration of other discourses which appear to be 'externally' sourced but which effectively impose themselves upon – or perhaps, more accurately, integrate themselves within – the intersubjective experience of performing and sharing music in a folk club. It is to these 'external discourses' that we now turn.

Chapter 5: The Analysis (part 2): Music performance, power and discourse

5.1 Folk as liminoid practice in a subversive space

While case studies of specific 'musicking' events are capable of providing insights into the meanings that surround such practices, they may also be criticised for their methodological limitations for the sociologist and, indeed, for the ethnomusicologist. As individual ethnographic studies, they each provide a microcosm. We are afforded a glimpse into the domain that operates through its own terms of reference, terms which are revealed through the eyes of the participant observer venturing into the territory, armed with metaphorical flashlight to pick out and characterise instances of interaction and with the literary and linguistic power to interpret these vignettes. The descriptions that emerge from such observations raise questions and point to new directions for research into music-based cultural practice but they also distort understanding through their specificity and idiosyncrasy. It is convenient to see this domain as a self-contained social phenomenon, an anthropological treasure trove of a 'lost tribe', an eternal parallel world that reveals itself behind the 'green door' (or at least behind the notice on the folk club door asking you not to step in until the song is finished).

However, as Ian Burkitt (2008) points out, the world of entertainment and diversion within industrial capitalism presents itself as one where individuals find 'freedom to play with ideas, fantasies and materials [which] allows people to experience some sense of transcendence over social structural limitations, and also to engage in social relations with friends that are more equal and of mutual benefit' (Burkitt 2008, p.143). He indicates that it is not sufficient to regard such a world as a place of refuge or escape from the day-to-day pressures of working life. Citing Victor Turner (1982), he distinguishes between 'liminal' and 'liminoid' experience. The former refers to a discontinuation of 'profane social relations' (Turner 1974, p.59), a phenomenon in which normative structures in a social formation are suspended; people escape life routines and duties imposed by institutions and are free to enter a world or creativity or spirituality, for example through rites of passage or through

entertainment. Burkitt observes that liminal phenomena 'occur in all societies and involve the entire social group in ritual performance' (Burkitt 2008, p.143), whereas liminoid phenomena are specific to the conditions of industrial capitalism and develop on the margins of the political-economy of capitalist society. His example of the theatre as a liminoid activity could apply equally to the sharing of songs at a folk club:

> ...it is part of an 'entertainment industry' but is one in which the dramas of everyday life can be heightened and the underlying causes of collective experiences and tensions can be explored and critiqued. In this way, theatre can provide a liminoid space in which the rituals of everyday life can be played with, heightened, subverted, reassembled, made grotesque and critiqued. It is an experience that is both part of the time and space of industrial capitalism, yet one that finds ways to break free from it. (Burkitt 2008, p.143)

The anthropological process of observing behaviours and social exchanges at amateur music events provides evidence which, when interpreted within a symbolic interactionist perspective, seems to reveal the ideological framework that produces a sense of meaning and cohesion to the event, constructing it as a micro-community (a gathering of amateur musicians) within the institutional community of 'the folk scene'. But as a liminoid activity, such a community necessarily draws on its context for terms of reference. Not only the songs and tunes themselves but their derivation, the stories behind them, their status as forms of cultural expression, the styles in which they are performed, the instruments on which they are played, all are reflective of the wider repertoire of personal and cultural experience, histories and ideologies. And not only the repertoires of the musical performers but the wider social repertoires of all participants – audiences, organisers, musicians, singers, bar staff and glass collectors – are based on the political, economic and cultural frameworks of industrial and post-industrial capitalism. Rather than provide an escape pod from the rigours of daily life, the microcosm feeds from the cultural universe in which it floats. The meanings produced and shared are not self-contained but are drawn from – and reflect – wider discourses brought into the domain by those who take part; they are just as significant in their shaping of intersubjective identity as those phenomena – those 'object-signs' – identified through the ethnographer's case study observation.

The nature and character of the folk club as an event becomes apparent through the communicative actions of its participants, actions which articulate a framework of knowledge, a complex set of ideas related to identity, repertoire, motivation and gratification, among other factors. What is vital to consider for this analysis is that such ideas may be defining characteristics of the music-making event but they are not inherent to it. They are instead borne of the dynamic and fluid environment which, in terms of meaning production, provides life-blood for the event, locating it within a broader cultural hierarchy and defining it institutionally and ideologically.

The discourse of this particular form of 'musicking' – the assembly of friends and associates who play and share music in a folk club – is therefore one derived not only from its own internal mechanisms and modes of behaviour deemed appropriate for each club, or indeed each format adopted by that club on any given week. It draws, by necessity on a range of external discourses. Some of these are quite specific and self-evident, for example in the lyrics of songs performed or in the 'patter' employed by performers when introducing the songs: politics, human rights, work, personal relationships, history, folklore, economics, celebrity icons, and so on. Others are more insidious and engrained within the ideology of post-industrial capitalism: processes of commodification, effects of the 'free market', the impact of globalisation, codes of taste and aesthetics, the concept of individualism, and related codes of personal morality, to name a few.

Rather than view a night out at the local folk club as a structured experience determined by external discourses however, it is productive to move this analysis from focus on the event as 'text', based on a system of complex signs, and to consider instead an event that 'speaks' the ideas that give it substance through *practice*. The folk club is regarded not as one component in the sum total of a cultural entity known as 'the folk scene' but is viewed, through the actions and interactions of its participants as, simultaneously, a moment in history, a manifestation of cultural expression and a demonstration of how such expressive performance works concurrently to reflect and define the social relationships of its participants. I would further argue that folk clubs and music sessions particularly lend themselves to this form of analysis precisely because of a tradition or aspiration of such events to operate *outside* the mainstream, to 'lurk on the liminoid sidelines', to meet in the

back rooms of pubs and to occupy a space rarely explored by the 'official' narratives of popular music, not only in the media but also in academia.

An analysis of amateur music-making discourse is therefore incomplete without considering the impact of discourses whose terms of reference are external to the events. One may perceive a folk club as positioned on a range of intersecting lines of polarity and this investigation is based on the identification of four such lines as particularly significant in producing an understanding of amateur music-making in folk clubs as a cultural practice: *specialist to mainstream*; *amateur to professional*; *unofficial to official*; and *'folk' to 'non-folk'* (see *fig.1*). This chapter considers each of these as sites of struggle or negotiation with a range of external discourses whose presence or influence may be detected in the formulation of a meaningful framework for participants in amateur music events. These discourses may be linked to distinctive 'fields', in the sense applied by Bourdieu (1993), each representing a set of orthodox, institutional values which legitimise cultural practice and

Fig. 1 – Intersecting lines of polarity
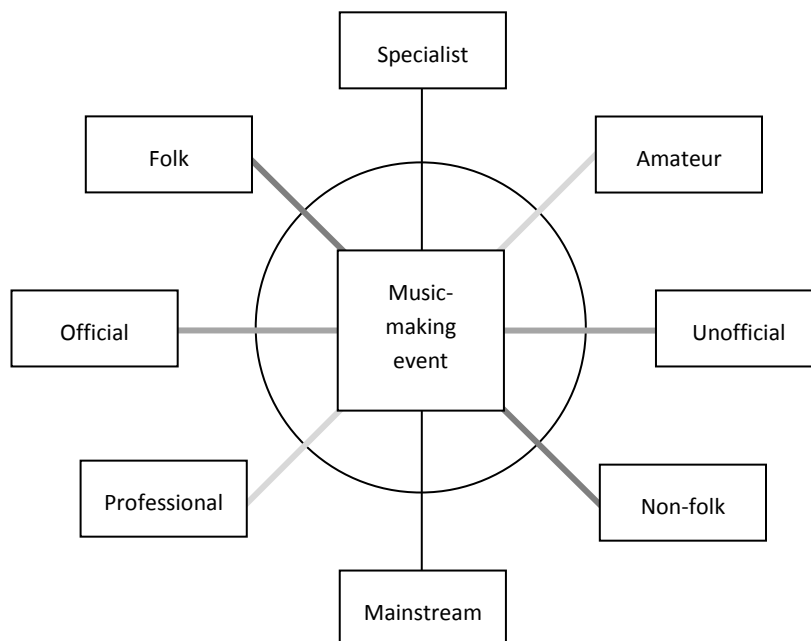
construct the individual's experience of – and relationship with – such practice (through prevailing social norms or 'habitus'). The fields of interest here are:

i. the domain of 'popular' culture (specialist to mainstream);

ii. the music industry (amateur to professional);

iii. the fields of regulation and administrative control (unofficial to official); and

iv. the 'folk scene' or 'folk community' as an organised, self-regulating, hierarchical movement whose function is to promote, safeguard and represent the interests of 'folk' performers and participants ('folk' to 'non-folk').

It should be emphasised at this point that each of these lines of polarity is offered as a conceptual, heuristic device. It would be simplistic to suggest that these signify a self-evident structure based on binary oppositions but, for the purposes of this analysis, they serve to map out those discursive frameworks which may be most productively examined.

Chapter 5.2: The domain of 'popular' culture (specialist to mainstream)

This line of polarity indicates a positioning of amateur music in general, and folk music in particular, as oppositional to mainstream, marginalised or redefined in value-laden terms within the dominant framework of popular cultural production. Ironically, it draws on notions of 'popularism' as 'music of the people' as opposed to 'music for a mass market' and locates amateur music-making as a practice that is self-evidently social and non-commercial. Within the discourse of commercial institutions, 'folk' music becomes a convenient 'bin category' (Horner 1999, p.23) or sub-genre within an industry of cultural production in which taste and pleasure in listening are determining factors in the practices of production, marketing and distribution.

Populist conceptions of folk music manifest themselves in a wide range of cultural events and practices from barn dances to buskers, from morris dancers to medieval banquets, and within the commercial discourse of tourism, heritage and the pub trade. Singer-songwriters who accompany themselves on acoustic guitar are defined as 'folk' or 'folkie' in mainstream media, and representational stereotypes abound of protest singers, shanty singers and 'finger-in-ear' singers. (As a folk correspondent for a local newspaper, I have often been sent news of Irish music concerts and dance events on the apparent assumption that Irish popular culture is classified as 'folk' in England.) An analysis of representations of 'folk', as a genre and practice, within popular culture would provide sufficient material for a separate dissertation but conceptions of a differentiation between 'folk' as specialist music and populist 'mainstream' music do raise questions on how we conceive of 'popularity' in this context and on the extent to which popular, or mainstream, forms of cultural production do manifest themselves and shape amateur music discourse.

Use of the terms 'popularity' and 'mainstream' in the study of popular music are themselves problematic. David Brackett recognises that the term 'mainstream' is 'malleable and stylistically heterogeneous' (Brackett 2003, p.241) and suggests a structural function in providing 'a "center" for other, "alternative" or "marginal" genres' (*ibid*). Jason Toynbee refers to mainstream as 'a hegemonic formation which strives to institute a universal music' (Toynbee 2000, p.122) but recognises its loose application and pejorative inferences. He

cites and partly agrees with Sarah Thornton's criticism that 'mainstream' is itself an ideological rather than an analytical term (Thornton 1995, pp.92-8), but argues that it can be usefully related to a political-economy perspective – 'the mainstream has to transcend particular communities in order to reach the largest number of people possible' (Toynbee 2000, p.122) – and to Gramsci's concept of hegemony – 'the idea that dominant social formations consist in alliances which cohere on the basis of consent' (p.123). He re-examines this in a later publication by challenging the writing-off of 'mainstream' as a dominant ideological form and offering a more active, practice-based definition: '*A mainstream is a formation that brings together large numbers of people from diverse social groups and across large geographical areas in common affiliation to a musical style*' (Toynbee 2002, p.150 – author's emphasis).

If mainstream refers us to a majority, or at least large numbers, Simon Frith considers the difficulties of equating populism with consumption and market demand, measured in ratings, music charts and other forms of statistical or ranked data: 'Even if such figures were accurate (which is doubtful), they provide no evidence as to why such goods are chosen by their consumers nor whether they are actually enjoyed or valued by them' (Frith 1996, p.15). He argues for a view of popularity that takes into account value judgements and discrimination, rather than sales figures alone. Relevant to my study is his linking of these factors to the establishment of social relations with musical taste and consumption:

> If social relations are constituted in cultural practice, then our sense of identity and difference is established in *the processes of discrimination*. And this is as important for popular as for bourgeois cultural activity, important at both the most intimate levels of sociability (an aspect of the way in which friendships are formed and courtship organised), and at the most anonymous levels of market choice ... These relationships between aesthetic judgments and the formation of social groups are obviously crucial to popular cultural practice, to genres and cults and subcultures. (Frith 1996, p.18)

Frith's equation of taste and identity is useful provided it does not lead to a conclusion of folk as a demarcated zone of specialist musical connoisseurship. The specialist-mainstream line of polarity maps out degrees of differentiation and compromise rather than mutual exclusivity and, for the purposes of this analysis, plays a vital role within the discourse of

folk music, one that is widely shared and understood. The folk 'scene' in England appears to have an ambivalent view on its incorporation into the 'mainstream'; criticism is often expressed over a perceived lack of media empathy with, and state support for, the folk genre – see for example Emma Hartley's (2013) article in *The Spectator* on the BBC Radio 2 Folk Awards – while interpretations of 'folk' by some media commentators is also regarded as inauthentic and compromised 'folk' music for popular consumption. One contemporary illustration of this is the extent of online forum discussion[38] on whether a band like Mumford and Sons should be classified as 'folk' or, as one critic recently described them 'a competent rock band with banjos' (Hasted 2013).

My research has indicated the openness of many folk venues, including those selected for case study, to seemingly 'non-folk' repertoires and genres, as evidenced for example by Warwick Folk Club's 'Top 20' theme night (see pages 117-8). It would be inaccurate and simplistic to suggest however that policy liberalism by folk club organisers constitutes a compromise to populist tastes or an opening for popular culture to 'leak into' the rarefied domain of a specialist music environment. Even a conceptualisation of 'folk' as a mode of performance or aesthetic (see page 196) would not, I suggest, fully explain the position of popular culture within folk club discourse.

The relationship is best understood as two-fold but asymmetric. On the one hand, products of popular culture do find expression and exposure within folk clubs through songs and lyrical content, performance styles, shared references to cultural icons and practices, jokes and pastiche performances, indeed all forms of interactive behaviour, through their capacities as reference points and foci for shared knowledge and topical agenda. These references are brought into the domain by participants themselves through their individual lived experiences and cultural repertoires. On the other hand, folk musicians have a choice to render their performances more accessible to non-specialist audiences through allusion to contemporary cultural references in their selection, interpretation, arrangement and performance of songs and tunes. The relationship is thus symbiotic but one in which the

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[38]   See for example, Mudcat, <http://mudcat.org/thread.cfm?threadid=135716> and fRoots <http://www.froots.net/phpBB2/viewtopic.php?t=6841&view=next&sid=7f59b366e48ee79464f338fa6d3d fd9f> (both sites accessed 21st March 2013).

mainstream is able to reinforce its hegemonic status. From a symbolic interactionist perspective, the folk club must remain a relatively 'open' institution, despite its self-defining terms of reference, in order to survive and function within a social world. As a site for discursive practice, it constructs an identity for itself and its participants, through its selective appropriation of popular and mainstream concepts as reference points for both simulation and subversion. The more these concepts are accommodated, the more likely the club is to engage a wider, non-specialist audience with, arguably, a concomitant expectation of meeting more criteria of professionalism (see *fig. 2a*).

Specialist to mainstream polarity (discourse of popular culture)

Fig. 2a
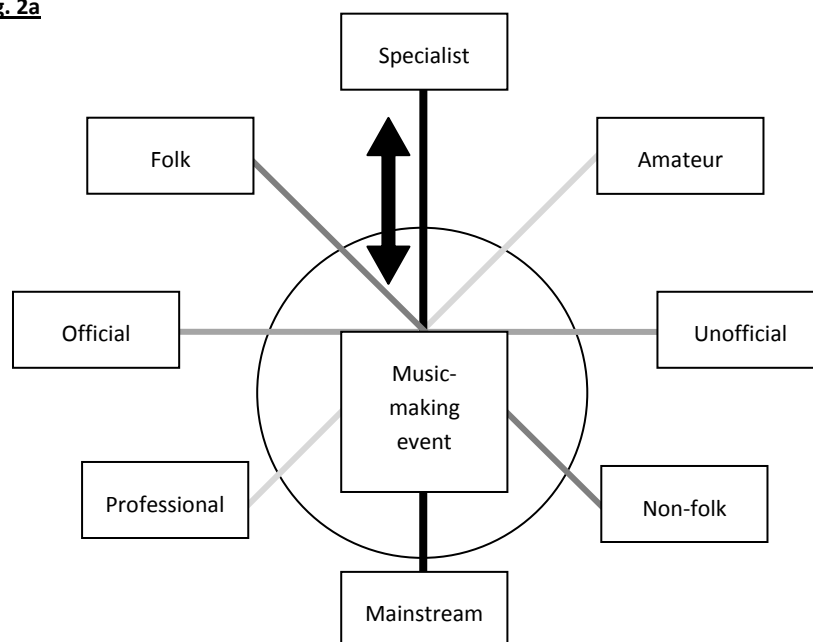
A shift away from mainstream towards specialist at a folk club may indicate greater emphasis on 'authentic' folk repertoires shared by amateur enthusiasts (see *fig. 2b*).

In the domain of the folk club, amateur musicians role-play the experience of mainstream 'performance' on a stage (real or imaginary), invoking (or attempting to invoke) the traits of artistry and virtuosity through their use of voice and instrumentation, anticipating

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Fig. 2b
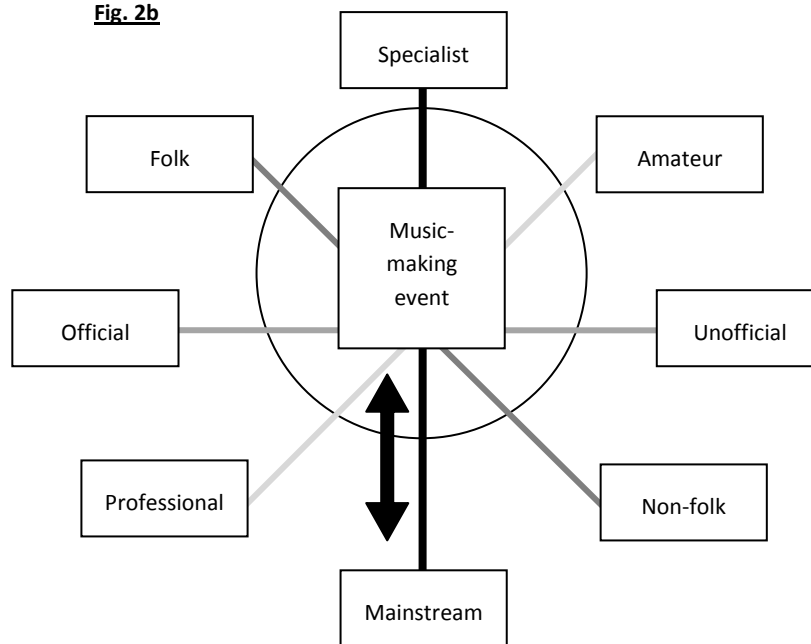
audience attentiveness and applause, and adopting a presentational style in addressing and engaging with audience members by investing them with identities of fans, consumers of entertainment and confederates in the discourse of folk. At the same time (as I have suggested on pages 160-1), fellow participants adopt the role of audience, talking on these ascribed identities and offering not only attentiveness but forbearance when amateur performances fall short of expectations one might harbour of a more 'professionally' accomplished performer. The expectations themselves, the shared narratives of popular songs, the recognition of indicators of showmanship and self-promotion, the location of the artist as the focus of mass attention in a performance area organised for optimum visibility and audibility, all are derived from the discursive frameworks of mainstream entertainment. Even the floor singer who refuses to use a PA system, or remains determinedly seated in the audience to perform an unaccompanied song, conveys a message whose resonance is perceived only within those discursive terms of reference; one has to recognise the mainstream to reject it.

Chapter 5.3: The music industry (amateur to professional)

I have already indicated how the terms of 'amateur' and 'professional' within music-making practices connote both status and performance quality (see pages 142-5). At one level, the amateur-professional line of polarity operates discursively through the structure and organisation of the amateur music event and its relationship with 'professional', i.e. commercial institutions, agents, promoters, media organisations and professional musicians themselves. At the same time it marks out a domain of taste, artistry and virtuosity in musical performance that fulfils criteria and expectations of quality, competence and artistic integrity.

As sites for negotiation (and sometimes tension) between amateur and professional practice – reflecting business-related concepts of efficiency, accountability and consumer satisfaction and based on economic and contractual relationships – most folk clubs have changed little since MacKinnon's observations in the early 1990s of a potential clash of perspectives: 'The folk clubs are universally run by amateurs. There are no folk club impresarios. The events are not structured for profit' (MacKinnon 1993, p.72). Described here is an organisational structure which places 'limitations of scale upon its performers' and 'works against stardom' (p.73). Nevertheless, the worlds of the amateur and professional practitioner intersect at points of contact between organiser and guest act representative, when the latter is seeking to obtain and negotiate a paid booking.

The organiser of one of my case study clubs admits that she finds some agents difficult to deal with and tries to avoid working through them whenever possible:

> I prefer to book people that I've actually seen perform – you never know if what you hear on a CD is what you'll get – you can get a whole band playing on a record and a solo artist turning up. I had one particular artist's agent phoning up all the time – 'go on, give them a gig, give them a gig' and I gave in and I wished I hadn't. So I'm quite careful about who I book. I prefer to deal direct with the artist, not the agent. It's probably cheaper to cut out the agent and the artists often come direct, even though they do have agents. (Karen Orgill – The Tump Folk Club)

Arguably, her approach could be regarded as showing more business acumen by saving money, despite her reluctance to engage in the traditional commercial discourse of music agency. Warwick Folk Club does work with agents and tolerates the administrative procedures involved but its organiser remains sceptical about the nature of the professional relationship that agents seek to establish:

> Sometimes, agents will send out a standard contract and that mildly annoys me because 90% of it is not applicable. Let's say dressing room with certain things in, a bit like pop stars asking for M&Ms with all the yellow ones taken out, you know (laughs). Really? A dressing room? Don't be silly, it's a folk club ... do they really have to change in a dressing room? What are they changing into? 'Changing into my scruffy clothes!' (laughs) It's not exactly a tuxedo is it? (Norman Wheatley – Warwick Folk Club)

However, Norman does recognise mutual benefits in establishing a contractual relationship between an amateur club organiser and a professional guest artist, especially when an agent is involved:

> These people are professional. The agent is also getting a percentage. It must be difficult for agents like that. They're dealing with non-professional organisations, i.e. we don't make money for what we do. And yet the agreement has still got to be there. Van Morrison once famously said 'Music is spiritual, the music business is not!' (Norman Wheatley)

Professionalism and amateurism are ambiguous and value-laden concepts which relate to performance quality as well as organisational practice and economic relationships. When considered in relation to music-making as popular practice, they may function discursively as criteria for quality judgement. However, observation of amateur music-making in folk clubs quickly demonstrates the inadequacy of such a binary and mutually exclusive view; there is considerable space in the folk movement for the 'pro-am' as characterised by Leadbeater and Miller (2004): 'a new breed of amateur ... knowledgeable, educated, committed and networked, by new technology' (p.12).

A line of amateur-professional *polarity* may be analytically useful in that the terms are recognised and applied (sometimes in both cases derisively) to performance and organisation at folk clubs, but it has limited value in the identification of external discourses and their influence on folk clubs, unless we recognise this line as at least a continuum or

even a paradox. We have seen (for example, in Chapter 4.3) how the folk club environment can offer space for the comfortable juxtaposition of professional and amateur music-making practices, for example in the relationships between floor singers, guest artists and paying audiences.

Beyond the pragmatic and legalistic issues of the amateur-professional relationship, this line of polarity nevertheless represents a scale of values and expectations related to musical performance, competence and audience engagement. A shift along this line towards 'professional' suggests, in all senses, closer proximity to mainstream expectations within official discourse (see *fig. 3a*).

Amateur to professional polarity (professional discourse of the music industry)

Fig. 3a
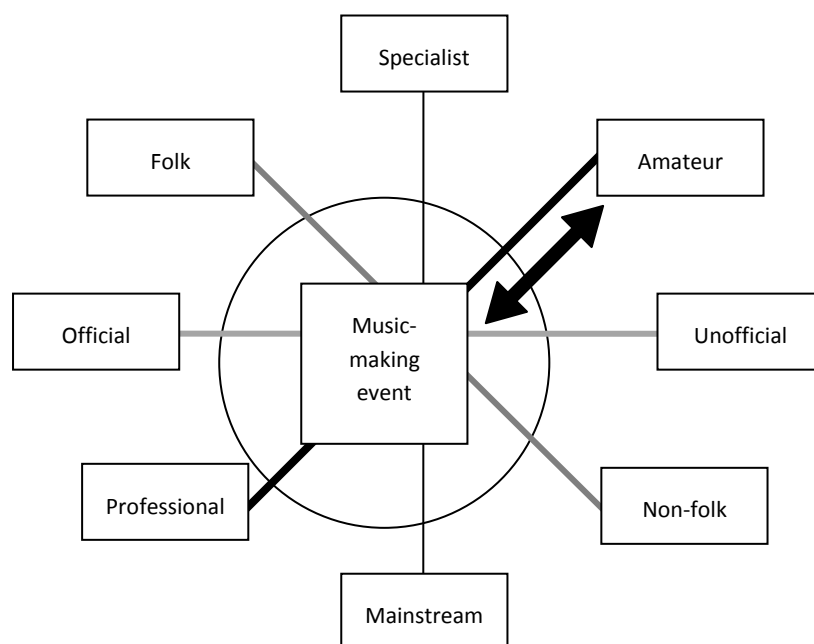
Emphasis on amateur offers greater scope for engaging specialist taste and interest, for example through less commercial pressure (see *fig. 3b*).
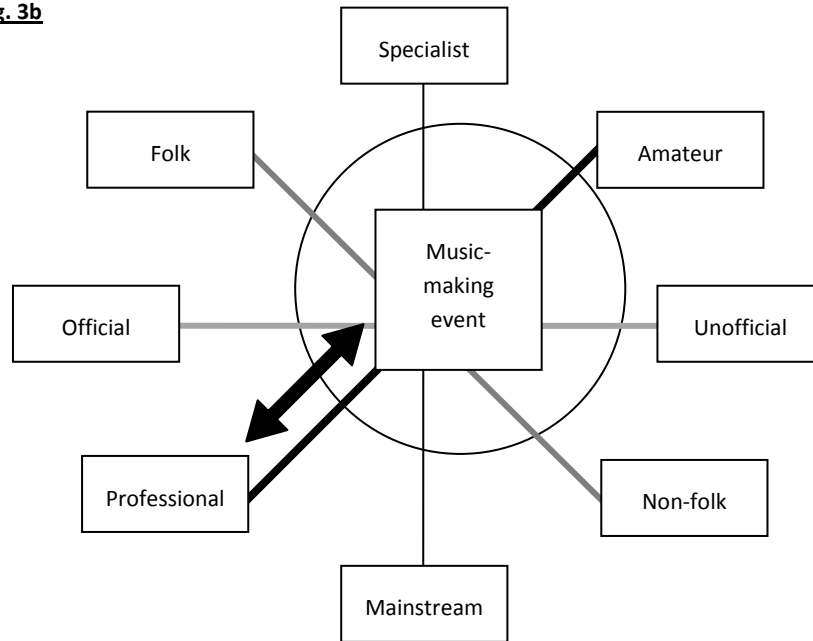
The notion of 'professional' quality in performance may form part of an audience's appreciation of a guest artist but within the discursive environment of an amateur music event, the concept is laden with connotations of commodity value and, indeed, proximity to 'mainstream' standards. Just as an accomplished amateur musician may be admired for a performance deemed equal to 'professional' standard, so the professional guest who has stepped in to the amateur domain for the one night of their appearance faces judgment on specific criteria: not only whether they provide 'value for money' through the quality of their performance but also (and this is a particular concern on the folk club circuit) whether they are loyal to their folk 'roots', despite commercial success and high media visibility, for example by charging fees that folk clubs can afford, interacting with folk club members throughout the evening, and listening to the support acts or floor singers who also make up that evening's experience.

In his reflections on the proto-market (see page 198), Jason Toynbee refers us to Bourdieu's 'field of restricted production' where 'artists and audience ... distinguish themselves from the values associated with the mass market' (Toynbee 2000, p.27). Bourdieu makes a distinction between 'art-as-commodity' and 'art-as-pure-signification' (Bourdieu 1984b, p.3); to perceive a work of art (including a guest performance at a folk club) as a form of merchandise with exchange value, necessitates agreement with *cognoscenti* within that

field of art that the work has creative, expressive and meaningful value irrespective of its price tag. Hence the amateur-professional relationship intrinsic to folk clubs as discursive events cannot be reduced to one of simple demand-and-supply, whereby paying audience members are transformed to consumers in a marketplace and performers function as pure commodities. In Bourdieu's formulation, the relationship is partially shaped by the intervention and mediation of those whose orthodoxy is established by their cultural capital, and by participants' acceptance and recognition of that orthodoxy that determines the commodity, indeed star status of that guest act:

> ... the field of restricted production can never be dominated by one orthodoxy without continuously being dominated by the general question of orthodoxy itself, that is, by the question of the criteria defining the legitimate exercise of a certain type of cultural practice. (1984b, p.7)

These *cognoscenti*, these mediators provide voices within the specialist discourse (including the institutional discourse of the 'folk scene' – see Chapter 5.5) which articulate a dominant aesthetic, hierarchy and agenda of who and what is in vogue. These are expressed not only through the voices of media commentators and established opinion leaders within the field, but also through the interactions, dialogues, personal accounts, shared anecdotes of participants – the speech through which discourse finds expression and through which object-signs (the 'professional' guests, their performances, their repertoires, their CDs) become formulated as meaningful within that discursive community.

Chapter 5.4: Regulation and administrative control (unofficial to official)

While it is feasible to characterise gatherings of amateur musicians at folk clubs as liminoid activities, their place within industrial capitalism is never immune from the administrative discourses of control and regulation. Ideological systems, ranging from free market economics to social responsibility within liberal democracy, prevail and underpin the organisational status of folk clubs and the operational decisions faced by folk club organisers. Clubs, and those who participate within them, may choose to operate at any point on a continuum, from a strict legalistic and constitutional framework, in which relationships with guest performers, venue owners, PA suppliers, etc. are commercially and contractually-based, to a loose, 'good will' consensual arrangement of favours and counter-favours, based on a shared motivation to ensure that the event takes place.

The extent to which folk clubs veer to the stricter position on this scale progressively marks out their self-proclaimed 'official' status, a space of influence through which the institutional folk scene may operate and a reference point for other institutional bodies, including media organisations, local authorities or state-supported agencies concerned with the promotion of culture. Thus a folk club that presents itself as an 'official' entity may reflect the orthodoxy of authentic and institutionally sanctioned 'folk' music performed there to a professional standard (see *fig. 4a*). Relatively 'unofficial' venues are less constrained by such

Unofficial to official polarity (regulatory and administrative discourse)

Fig. 4a

Specialist

Folk

Amateur

Official

Music-making event

Unofficial

Professional

Non-folk

Mainstream
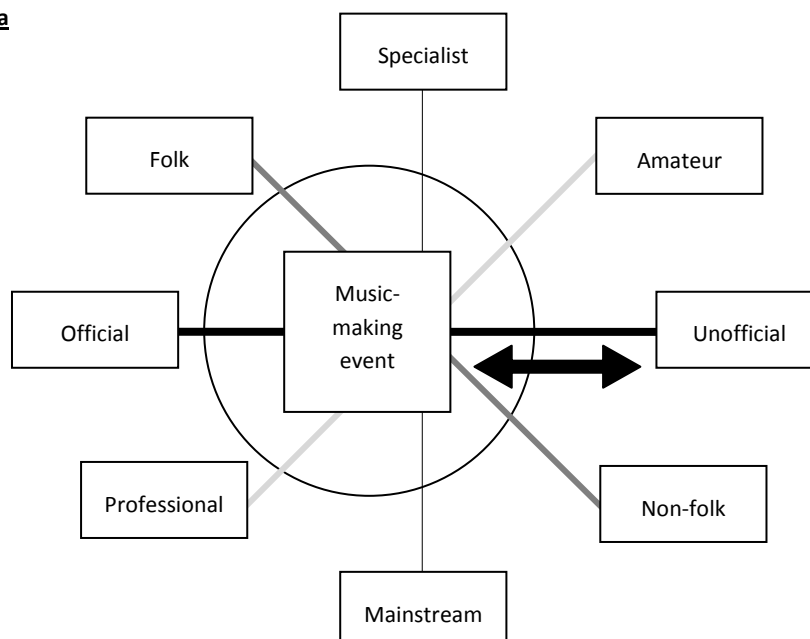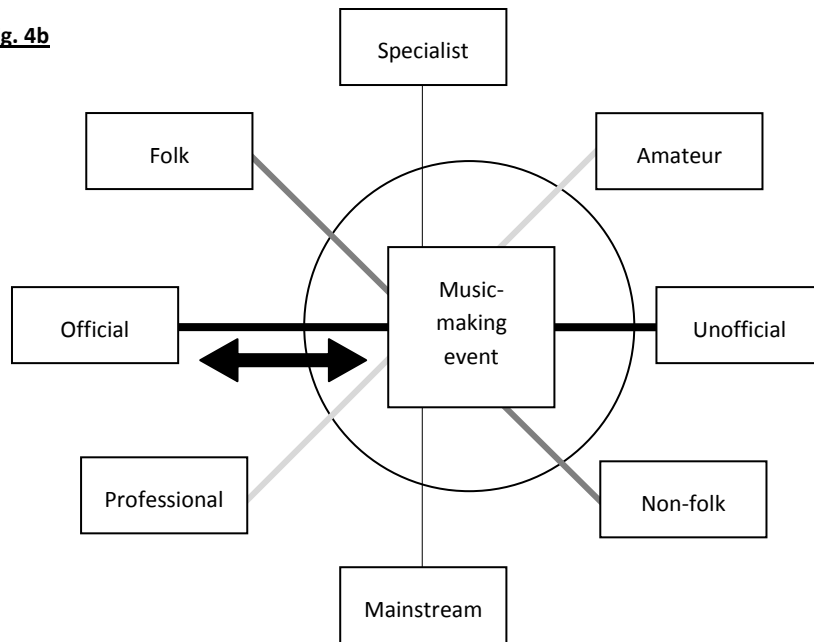
expectations. They may be smaller, more haphazardly organised, and with little or no financial support but can allow for a wider range of repertoire and performance competence in a less commercial environment (see *fig.4b*).

Unless folk clubs meet in private houses (and some do), they are all subject to a regulatory framework, although the impact of this may be mitigated or absorbed by the host venue. After lobbying campaigns from the early 1990s through *ad hoc* pressure groups (including Campaign for Live Music or CaLM and Live Music Forum), the Musicians Union and, more recently by former Musicians Union adviser Hamish Burchill (Burchill 2012), live music venues in England and Wales recently witnessed a relaxation of licensing regulation through the passing of the Live Music Act 2012 which partially deregulates the performance of live music by removing some of the conditions imposed by the Licensing Act 2003. Of particular relevance to folk clubs, these include the requirements for licensing unamplified music in a public venue between 8am and 11pm, and amplified music during those times before an audience of up to 200 people. The new Act also widens previous exemptions to allow live music to be performed for morris dance displays. These changes do not affect a local authority's right to impose conditions on alcohol licensing which may relate to live music performance but even before the Act was passed, many folk club organisers (including those

of all three case study clubs) worked under the assumption that any venue agreeing to host them had permission to stage live music:

> We leave that entirely to the venue. All the health and safety, fire exits, that kind of thing. One of our committee members has the official role of 'hotel liaison'. Sometimes we've got to go along with their requests on when the room is needed, but dealing with an organisation like a hotel possibly makes it easier than a pub. (Norman Wheatley – Warwick Folk Club)

> I don't remember having any formal discussion with the venue. I mean, when we lay out the room we make sure that the fire exit is not blocked. It's something I'm aware of. I think the room is licensed to hold up to 150 but we don't get a third of that. (Karen Orgill – The Tump Folk Club)

Public houses and hotels where music is performed in the UK are also required to comply with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, to obtain permission from composers and publishers of songs performed live in their premises and to pay royalties. This is facilitated by PRS For Music (2012) and, again, most folk club organisers see the arrangement of this as the venue's responsibility. Warwick Folk Club contributes towards the cost of its host venue's Performing Rights Society licence and, at the time of the fieldwork study for this research, The Tump Folk Club paid a weekly fee for use of the room, while its host venue obtained a PRS license to cover all of its live and recorded music.

As a constituent part of the intersubjective experience of amateur musicians when they meet at a folk club, regulatory and bureaucratic discourse may be manifested in numerous subtle ways – for example, health and safety considerations in the location of instrument cases, adherence to alcohol licensing conditions and in general through modes of civil behaviour and interaction. Invocation of statutory controls or contractual obligations is available to event organisers and venue representatives in the rare event that recourse to these is deemed necessary but recognition of the impact of an 'official – unofficial' line of polarity within amateur music discourse (when the event occurs in a public location such as a folk club) acknowledges the controlling and categorising function of bureaucratic discourse in all spheres of public and civil life. Within such discourse, the construction of 'official' and 'unofficial' as meaningful concepts entails a positioning of each subject

participating at the event and an articulation of choices apparently available to each subject within the scope of their interactive behaviour – to comply or not to comply with regulated norms as well as social norms.

Thus, the 'official-unofficial' line of polarity presupposes an investment of power within 'official' discourse, founded on agreed but externally prescribed sanctions and bureaucratic procedures of control. It is here that we find the mechanisms of disciplinary power which are key to Foucault's explanation of the adherence of subjects to social norms. These mechanisms are not intrinsic to the objects that signify the mode of experience shared by folk club participants but, rather, to the intersubjective relations established between objects and participants (including relations between participants themselves in their performance of roles, which – as we have established in Chapter 4.3 – constitute object-signs). Foucault summarises the nature and impact of these relations:

> The object of a discourse is established through a positive group of relations: these relations are established between institutions, economic and social processes, behavioural patterns, systems of norms, techniques, types of classification – but these relations are not present in the object, they do not define the internal constitution but only what enables it to appear, to be placed in a field of exteriority. (Foucault 1972, p.45)

While the 'official' may represent regulatory frameworks within which amateur music-making occurs, the 'unofficial' signifies the scope for resistance to external imposition of such frameworks and the proactive practices of establishing an alternative set of shared principles. The concept of obtaining permission from regulatory authorities may appear alien and burdensome to amateur musicians who meet informally and perform to each other in the back room of a pub and, consequently, many unregulated (and hence by their nature, uncounted) music-making events occur through the verbal agreement with public house landlords who see them as opportunities to increase custom. Such events may be treated as 'unofficial' to the extent that there are few, if any, visible procedures for regulation and accountability and the events themselves – while promoted locally, informally by word-of-mouth and fliers or posters, or online via personal social network messages – are largely invisible on 'official' platforms such as media listings and event announcements or dedicated websites. Additionally, an 'unofficial' status may be marked by

the lack of a formal constitution implemented procedurally by an organisational team, and evidenced by an informal and seemingly unstructured experience for participants, in contrast to the more clearly defined event formats, admissions policies or membership schemes that indicate mechanisms of control associated with the 'official'.

For many folk club organisers and amateur musicians, the appeal of the 'unofficial' lies in its informality and space for creativity. The club that 'makes its own rules', whether bureaucratic or normative, offers more freedom for impromptu performances, jam sessions and improvisations, than the 'official', policy-bound club's perceived obligation to present a more structured and rehearsed musical experience for an audience of customers and members. There is, of course, a place for both – and all in between – within the English folk club circuit, but while the latter veers more towards a professionalised consumer experience, the former reflects a greater degree of flexibility in format and tolerance of performance skills and repertoires which form the essence of amateur music discourse.

Chapter 5.5: The folk scene as institution (folk to non-folk)

While amateur musicians' performances in local folk clubs – musical and interactive – may be regarded as manifestations of social or community practice, it has been part of my thesis to demonstrate how the 'folk scene' as a national, indeed global, discursive phenomenon, constitutes an *institutional* influence that sets a powerful agenda – in terms of repertoire, theme, musical arrangement and aesthetic considerations – for the intersubjective practices of 'grass roots' amateur performances. It is true that many folk clubs today profess greater openness to the myriad influences of popular music culture, but there remains an orthodoxy or touchstone which provides a reference point for amateur musicians seeking opportunities to perform. Repertoires assume a shared orientation towards 'folk' music; songs are still referred to as either 'traditional' or 'contemporary'; stories behind the songs are often related to audiences before the songs are performed; songs are sometimes sung with accents or dialects – based on a cod regionalism or ruralism – that connote a style of performance from a bygone era; and, as I have discussed in Chapter 4.4, songs and tunes are arranged for performance on predominantly acoustic 'folk' instruments.

These are some of many characteristics that mark out the identity of the event as a 'folk' club but, unlike Brocken's (2003) experience of folk clubs manipulating the past to fulfil a fantasised and mythologised view of authenticity (see Chapter 1.3), my perception of clubs in many parts of England is one of greater accommodation of varied repertoires. This is more than a sense of liberal tolerance; the majority of visitors to venues such as The Tump and Warwick Folk Clubs are aged 40 and older and have accumulated experiences and associations with a more eclectic and wide-ranging spread of music styles. They are just as likely to identify with a discourse of personal nostalgia as they are with a collective awareness of traditional folk material and are thus willing to perceive their enjoyment of Beatles songs, songs by Chuck Berry, The Kinks or the Everly Brothers, performed by an amateur musician, as an authentic 'folk' experience. Even Sly Old Dogs and Friends, which has developed historically as a venue for mainly Irish and Scottish popular traditional music, provides 'safe' territory for the performance of contemporary songs, not only from the established repertories of 'folk' but also from acoustic rock, blues and skiffle.

I have indicated in Chapter 1.3 how the phenomenon of a 'folk revival' has been recorded and understood within an institutional narrative and historiography of English folk music. While the concept of 'revival' is a common point of reference for contemporary accounts of the English folk scene (Boyes 1993, Brocken 2003, Sweers 2005 and Burns 2012, to name a few), a distinction between two separate although interrelated movements is indicated in these accounts. One is a shifting paradigm from a bourgeois concern to archive and preserve the past to the articulation of working class experience of oppression, exploitation and poverty; the other is a move towards popularisation and reinvigoration of folk music by making it more accessible to younger and more 'mainstream' audiences. The latter is achieved partly through the incorporating of other musical influences – rock, blues, jazz, country, classical, even reggae and rap styles – and the use of electric instruments. It is also brought about through the application of more sophisticated and commercial practices in organisation, promotion and public relations, hence pointing towards a reaffirmation of contemporary bourgeois ideology in the control of the folk movement through the discursive practices of strategic management.

I have further indicated (on pages 38-41) how an 'institution' of folk music has emerged through a developing network of support groups, lobbyists, promoters, event organisers (especially for folk festivals), media platforms and commentators, academics and researchers, record labels, awards sponsors, and so on. Institutional practices and values vary in their degree of influence at the level of individual folk clubs and gatherings of amateur musicians. However, as we examine the relative impacts on amateur music-making of external discourses related to professionalism, regulation and popular culture, it becomes evident that each of their respective lines of polarity is inevitably linked to the institutional discourse of the English 'folk scene', which, for the purposes of this analysis, is represented by a transitional scale between 'folk' and 'non folk'.

This line of polarity indicates the relative impact of an institutionalised 'folk scene' on the discourse of the amateur music-making event. As the community of folk fans develops a greater sense of coherence and shared identity as part of a cultural movement, so the folk scene becomes more 'institutionalised' in the sense of efficient and productive sharing of resources, promotion of a shared set of ideals, recognition of a shared aesthetic and the

capacity to have a more powerful voice in cultural policies and legislation. The more integrated the event becomes with this institution, the greater its self-perception as an official and specialist entity (see *fig. 5a*). Events that consciously or otherwise distance themselves from the 'folk scene' may be more eclectic in their repertoires and open to mainstream cultural influences (see *fig.5b*).

'Folk' to 'non-folk' polarity (institutional discourse)

Fig. 5a
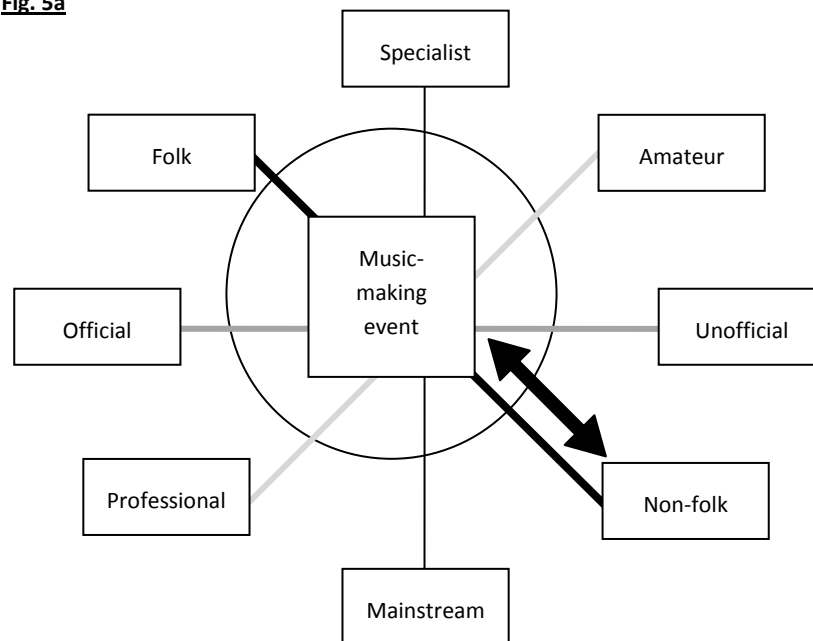
Fig. 5b
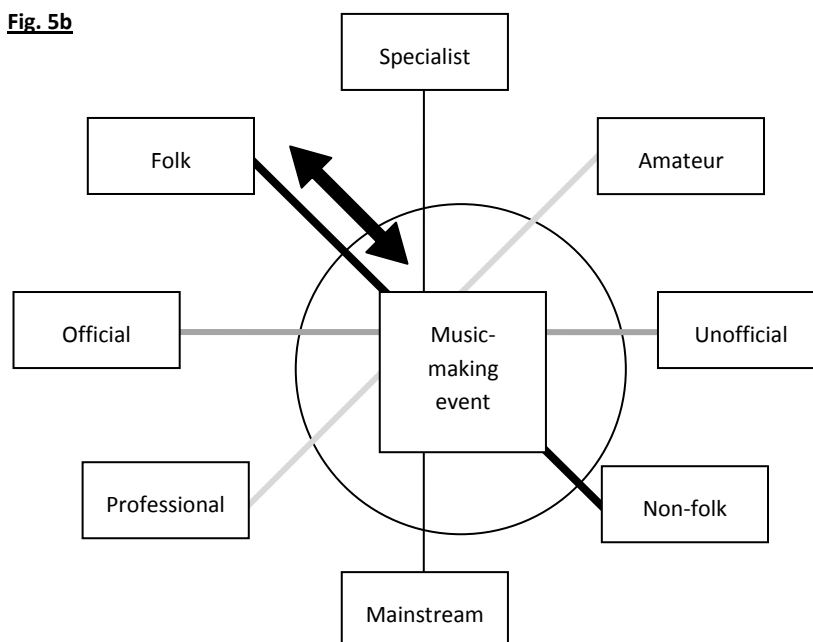
In both amateur and professional music-making events, a more clearly defined 'folk' identity offers greater sanction and support to that event by a recognised and self-defining folk community. Closer adherence to an institutionalised folk orthodoxy, in terms of repertoire and style, promotes an identity for participants intersubjectively as one that leans towards the 'specialist' (rather than 'mainstream') and part of an 'official' (rather than 'unofficial') organisational culture that is driven by objectives related to the sharing and preservation of 'folk' values and tradition. This raises the question of whether the 'folk' community itself, by developing its own institutional identity, risks losing sight of the 'roots' that it claims to represent by increasingly transforming itself into a managed, media-orientated and professionalised industry with its own standards and criteria for performance and musical arrangement – in Howard Becker's (1982) terms, an 'art world' but one which maps out 'folk' as an exclusive and regulated domain, imposing its own terms of reference on the individual gatherings of musicians that present themselves as 'folk clubs'.

Chapter 5.6: Music performance, power and discourse – an interim conclusion

In this chapter, I have set out to complement the detailed and necessarily selective application of object-sign analysis that was undertaken in Chapter 4, with discussion and characterisation of cultural powerbases and agencies and their discursive impact on the intersubjective experience of amateur musicians and participants in folk clubs. The conceptual problem that I have tried to address here is the necessity of avoiding a simplistic top-down characterisation in which powerful 'external' discourses are seen to impinge unchallenged on the peripheral world of amateur music-making at a grass-roots level. What was needed was a dynamic model that demonstrates a more fluid picture of intersection, complementation and negotiation of discourses, enabling the researcher to plot the specific moment of 'musicking' within a framework of varying levels of discursive influence.

The process of mapping external discourses as varying degrees of transition between two polar opposites not only offers a means of visualising the extent of their 'infiltration' into amateur music discourse but also highlights evidence of mutuality between them. Common to all external discourses considered in this chapter is their articulation of power relations which characterise the amateur music-making event as a site for negotiation ('struggle' is too strong a word) between interests and motivations to dominate and to resist. Thus the cumulative practices of each folk club, and the intersubjective frameworks within which these practices occur, constitute effectively a 'choice', a response to each external agenda by participants – albeit unconscious, instinctive or serendipitous – evidenced by the symbolically structured relationships and identities that befits them at such events. In simple terms, it reflects what they want from their night out at the local folk club.

Conclusion – putting the intersubjective folk into folk clubs.

In my introduction, I set out two related questions to be addressed by this research: *what are the characteristics of amateur music (as performed in English folk clubs) as discourse?* and *can such characteristics be ascertained through examination and analysis based on an intersubjective approach?* At first sight, these questions would appear to be about methodology and *the means* of understanding amateur music; it has certainly been my intention to demonstrate a conceptualisation of discourse in which amateur music-making is subjected to an analytical framework based on symbolic interactionism, highlighting the event as intersubjective practice.

However, by applying this method to specific case studies, I hope to have demonstrated that this work has achieved more than establish a new methodological approach to popular music scholarship, as important as that is. In this concluding section, I intend to set out what I believe has been accomplished through this work and its implications for further study in music and culture. In my attempt to present 'musicking' as a means of explaining amateur music-making and music-sharing as a dynamic and fluid mode of cultural engagement, my research has drawn attention, not only to the social and power-based relations that shape and structure amateur music discourse, but also to our engagement with music at an affective and emotive level.

Before commenting on the implications of this, I shall summarise the approach that I have adopted as a researcher and the direction in which I feel my thesis has developed. I shall start by discussing the rationale of the 'folk scene' as a field of study followed by critical reflection on the role and value of the concepts of 'musicking' and intersubjectivity and the insights that they are capable of revealing in the study of popular music. I shall then highlight those insights which I believe my focus on intersubjectivity has provided about amateur music-making in folk clubs and the extent to which these have been developed further through analysis of the dynamics of external discursive practices and agencies. This is followed by reflection on the main methodological issues arising from my research

activity, not least of which is my position and perspective as a researcher and an active participant on the English Midlands folk club circuit.

Exploring the 'folk scene'

The difficulties associated with the study of music as cultural practice arise from the need to establish common terms of reference to concepts that are, by their nature, abstract and prone to negotiation between theorists – 'culture', 'taste', 'identity', 'popular', 'mainstream' and, as I have discussed at length in Chapter 1, 'folk', 'folk revival', 'folk scene' and the historical and cultural explications of the overall folk movement. It is precisely because of the variety of perspectives in the study of folk, sometimes leading to vehement disparity of positions adopted by researchers – for example, Bearman's (2002) criticism of Harker (1985) and Milner's (n.d.) antipathy towards Brocken's (2003) reflections on the 'folk revival', as well as Hield's (2010, p.19) dismissal of Brocken's approach – that the topic is in need of further study. While my literature review, especially in Chapter 1.3, does refer to a considerable body of work that views folk music and song as objects of study for music historians, collectors and ethnomusicologists, the amount of research into folk clubs as social and cultural practices is sparse.

A possible reason for this (and a reason why more research *is* needed) is that folk clubs in England, as small, back-room, amateur gatherings, tend to operate on the margins of popular culture. Even though the folk movement has experienced some degree of success in self-revival since the 1970s and 1980s, by developing its own networks and promoting itself to younger audiences, its limited presence in mainstream media, and the persistence of stereotypical or simplistic representations of its styles and repertoires within popular culture suggest that there is considerable scope for further analysis. Some interesting work has been produced on its development of hybrid forms, notably folk-rock (for example Sweers 2005, Young 2011, Burns 2012), but the widespread practice of amateur musicians meeting and performing in small folk clubs have received relatively little scholarly attention since the first folk clubs emerged in the late 1950s.

In this dissertation, I have tried to demonstrate, through analysis of discursive practices related to specific folk clubs, that a focus on the *amateur* – with all the connotations associated with this term – is capable of providing critical insight into the dynamics of motivation, socialisation and identity-affirmation at a 'grass-roots' level of the folk scene. The small-scale, back-room environment of the singaround, music session or local guest night may appear to be peripheral territory in which we can explore and explicate music as cultural practice, but it is within this domain where the contrasts and negotiations between discursive frameworks are arguably the most noticeable.

Music-making as 'musicking'

As a starting point and central conceptual thread for this investigation, Chapter 1.2 sets out Christopher Small's reformulation of 'music' as a concept from noun to verb, from the object of composition and consumption to the practice of 'musicking' (Small 1987, 1998a). This has signalled a means of engaging with music less as an object-of-study, an anthropologically observed cultural product, but in a manner more fitting to the essence of music itself, a rhetorical, affective phenomenon, a form of meta-communication that touches and resonates with one's own sense of identity in a personal domain existing beyond structure and within (to quote a conceptual foundation for Sara Ahmed's exploration of happiness) 'the messiness of the experiential' (Ahmed 2010, p.22). This would suggest an aesthetic dimension to musicking as a social practice which may seem paradoxical at first. As Mary L.Cohen (2007) points out in her application of Small's concept to choral singing in prison contexts:

> A musicking experience differs from an aesthetic experience because musicking necessarily
> includes social dimensions ... and meanings are created through those dimensions. An
> aesthetic experience, on the other hand, tends to be limited to a single individual or object.
> (Cohen 2007, p.158)

Nevertheless, the concept of intersubjectivity, when applied to musicking, reminds us that the essence of social experience is its construction by those individuals who participate within it and their perceptions of this experience as something shared by like-minded fellow

participants. Hence, the individual aesthetic engagement with a composition or performance forms part of that intersubjective experience. On this basis, I argue that musicking is an intensely personal, experiential practice as well as a social and cultural one. This is on keeping with Small's assertion that *'performance does not exist in order to present musical works, but rather, musical works exist in order to give performers something to perform'* (Small 1998a, p.8 – author's italics). The individual's aesthetic experience of music-as-object is inextricably linked to the social practices and contexts of musicking in which the individual engages with the performance.

As my interview and social media survey responses have clearly indicated, performance is a social practice; even when rehearsing in isolation, the musician envisages an audience. For participants of music-making events, appreciation of, and engagement with, a musical performance constitutes a form of cultural practice. By inhabiting the role of audience, we focus on, and experience in unison, the performance as a purposive, cohesive act of social expression, invoking cultural recognition and identification. Our individual experience of the music performance is both shaped by, and reaffirming of, the outwardly expressed responses of fellow participants. The personal is transformed into the intersubjective as we read each other's signs and celebrate the commonality of shared, cultural experience.

I believe that I have shown that 'musicking' and intersubjectivity are closely related and powerful analytical concepts, capable of revealing much about our engagement with music at both a cultural and personal level. Before moving on to the insights offered by intersubjective analysis, it is worth stating here that 'musicking' as a concept is, in itself, worthy of critical examination and wider application to the study of music as a cultural practice. Small's original use of the term was instrumental to his thesis that Afro-American music styles and traditions are more accessible and integral to lived experience than the more authoritarian and dominant European tradition which presents music as the product of the composer-genius or artistic elite (Small 1987). Small celebrates Afro-American music as 'not a collection of sound-objects, or a repertory of pieces, or even a group of musical styles narrowly considered, but an approach to the act of music making, a way of playing and responding to music' (1987, pp.13-14).

While Small's advocacy for the study of music as performance activity, rather than object, (Small 1998a, p.50) is present in subsequent theorising of popular music (for example, Toynbee 2000, p.54; Frith 1996, p.137), the full implication of 'musicking' as a more comprehensively applied concept – embracing performance, reception, all related activity and interaction, cultural experience, identity, emotional bonding – suggests that it has much more to offer to our understanding of music as cultural practice. Small's ideas do not negate the appropriateness of a discursive analysis of a music event based on object-signs. The objects and practices which coalesce and constitute a music-making event provide the means of understanding and characterising the ways in which participants interact and establish identities through the intersubjective sharing of meanings, but these 'objects' may be treated as the environmental details which attain their significance through the mutual, intersubjective agreement of performers and audiences. They point towards – and emerge from – the social rituals and cultural frameworks that shape the practice of musicking and its significance to those who take part.

To treat music itself as the 'object' is to suggest that its status in popular music culture is restricted to that of something to be consumed, a commodity. To view musicking as practice indicates how 'objects', associated with and integral to such practice, take shape within the communal, discursive experience of people sharing music and how people in turn derive a sense of identity though this experience. Thus the analysis of object-signs as a means of understanding the discursive and symbolic nature of music-making, provides an insight into the richness of musicking as a potentially transcendental experience of engagement and identity affirmation.

Insights from intersubjectivity

Chapter 2's discussion on methodology examines issues arising from ethnographic research, in particular the validity of interpretation when attempting to formulate an analysis of discourse. In Chapter 2.2, I suggest that symbolic interactionism offers scope for more rigorous and authoritative interpretation of amateur music discourse by viewing the activity of music-making in folk clubs as intersubjective practices.

As discussed in Chapter 2.3 and demonstrated throughout Chapter 4, I have applied a symbolic interactionist approach in the identification and analysis of 'objects' that provide a framework for the intersubjective experience and practice of amateur music-making. I have shown that, for analytical purposes, the term 'object' refers not only to physical, inanimate 'things' that may be found in the territory of the folk club but to a comprehensive and complex range of *object-signs*, including performance styles, repertoires, event formats, role relationships, even concepts of economic exchange and value. Through the attribution, by participants, of significance to these objects, and the particular connotative meanings represented by them, these object-signs form the constituent elements of the 'musicking' domain. Their meanings become articulated through the practices of performing, sharing and interacting through music. As objects (and as subjects – the roles adopted and projected by the participants themselves), they feed off each other and nourish each other, forming a dynamic web of interrelationships that provides a cohesive schema of signification – a discourse in which participants immerse themselves and from which they draw their own sense of identity.

This research has further shown that the interactions, statements and practices of folk club participants are not immune from the macro cultural dynamics of a developing institutionalisation of the folk scene. Neither do they escape from the discursive influences of a professionalised music industry, a bureaucratic framework of legalistic controls and the dominance of mainstream cultural production. In Chapter 5, the second stage of my analysis has attempted, through the identification of what I have termed as 'external' discourses, to set out a means of conceptualising the impact of these discourses on intersubjective experience and identity for participants within this foundational domain of the amateur folk club. From the approach adopted in my analysis, based on a consideration of these discursive practices as variable and interrelated, I have again sought to map out and apply a rationale which offers an interpretation more substantial than metaphor and more illuminating than polemic.

In the midst of all object-signs that make up the intersubjective domain of the folk club, the music, as performed, becomes theoretically the central 'object' that gives meaning to the

whole occasion; it puts the 'folk' (as genre) into 'folk club'. However, as Small reminds us, to understand music as an object is to *mis*understand music in essence. Essentially 'musicking' is practice – it *is* the performance, and performance is social; it puts 'folk' (as people) into 'folk club'.

Methodological issues - my position and perspective as a researcher

This research has shown that the process of identifying and characterising object-signs enables us to interpret the particular system of significance that is shared by participants at a music-making event like a folk club and, in doing so, provides each of them with a role position and basis for interaction. At the same time, this analysis – as a rational scholarly practice – suggests a conceptual framework for understanding amateur music-making as discourse. It takes us beyond detailed description, based on ethnographic immersion and observation, to something less prone to the vagaries of individual interpretation.

On this basis, I hope to have demonstrated in this work that the analysis is not only able to draw on the researcher's lived experience in the world of folk clubs but even depends on this for its own validity. I make the claim in Chapter 2.3 that my personal observations, impressions, anecdotes and diary accounts, when considered within this methodological framework, can be offered as valid components that provide authority to the overall analysis: indeed, insights that could not be gleaned without access to the experience of amateur music-making. The rationale of this argument rests on Garfinkel's (1967) concept of indexicality – the recognition of shared set of meanings that people attach to social situations from inside those situations – and Bourdieu's (1990) argument that, indeed, such meanings can *only* be understood from within those meaning systems.

In methodological terms, this provides me with a strong rationale for selecting folk clubs that I am familiar with as case studies and reassures me that my own considerable experience in the world of folk music can be drawn on as a source of knowledge and framework for interpretation. This is nothing new. On the basis that it is impossible to attempt an understanding of music as cultural practice without recourse to interpretative

paradigms, popular music research frequently relies on case studies as a means of providing insight. Examples range from David Grazian's blues club in Chicago (2003) to Tim Wall's Northern Soul dance floor (2006) and include the folk clubs observed by John Smith (1987), Ruth Finnegan (1989), Niall McKinnon (1993) and Fay Hield (2010) among others. They provide a means of (re)presenting personal experience and involvement as a written text of observations and critical reflections, a product of academic discourse. Furthermore, these examples demonstrate that case studies of peripheral, non-mainstream, musical activity are no less valid as domains for research. Folk clubs, blues clubs and Northern Soul dance clubs share an orientation to historically and culturally located musicking practices that may have specialist appeal but reveal important insights about the place of music in contemporary cultural experience. Marginal or mainstream, each case study constitutes a significant and revealing element in the aggregation of popular culture practices.

Longer term implications

To summarise, this thesis makes a case for the study of folk clubs as discursive domains for amateur music-making, not to indulge any specialist interest in folk music *per se* but to exploit the under-utilised capacity of folk clubs to promote new understandings of our engagement with music (and not just 'folk' music) at an individual and cultural level. This is best achieved by treating the folk club – or, indeed the entire folk movement – not as an *object* of study but as a manifestation of *practice*.

To view the folk scene as a structure, bound by rules and rituals, caught up in its own historical narrative, relegates it to a status of specialist genre or subculture. In contrast, the concept of 'musicking' with its focus on folk as a form of cultural participation opens new doors in understanding all forms of popular music. It shifts our attention from structure to practice, from sign-system to discourse and presents itself as a dynamic, intersubjective domain rich in scholarly potential. It offers a pathway to a deeper understanding at an experiential, grass-roots level, of the folk scene in England, insights which are less accessible through an ethnomusicological or historical study of folk music as a cultural phenomenon or a narrative of revivals and class struggle. By focusing on the meanings embedded in

intersubjective practices – meanings associated with objects, identities and their interrelationships – it is possible to consider these practices as something more than symptoms of sociological or psychological motivations.

Music 'means something' to us if we feel able to identify with it. Through intersubjectivity – the sharing and recognition of meanings invoked through performance – we become part of it and it becomes part of us. This experiential and cultural phenomenon is evident when we consider the place of amateur musicians – of music lovers – within the complex and dynamic discursive world that 'musicking' invites us to inhabit. It is a phenomenon that is clearly not exclusive to folk clubs and offers scope for wider analysis of the role and place of music in our lives, identities and cultural experience.

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Appendix A   Club organiser interview thematic framework and structure

(My research notes)

<u>Rationale (territory)</u>
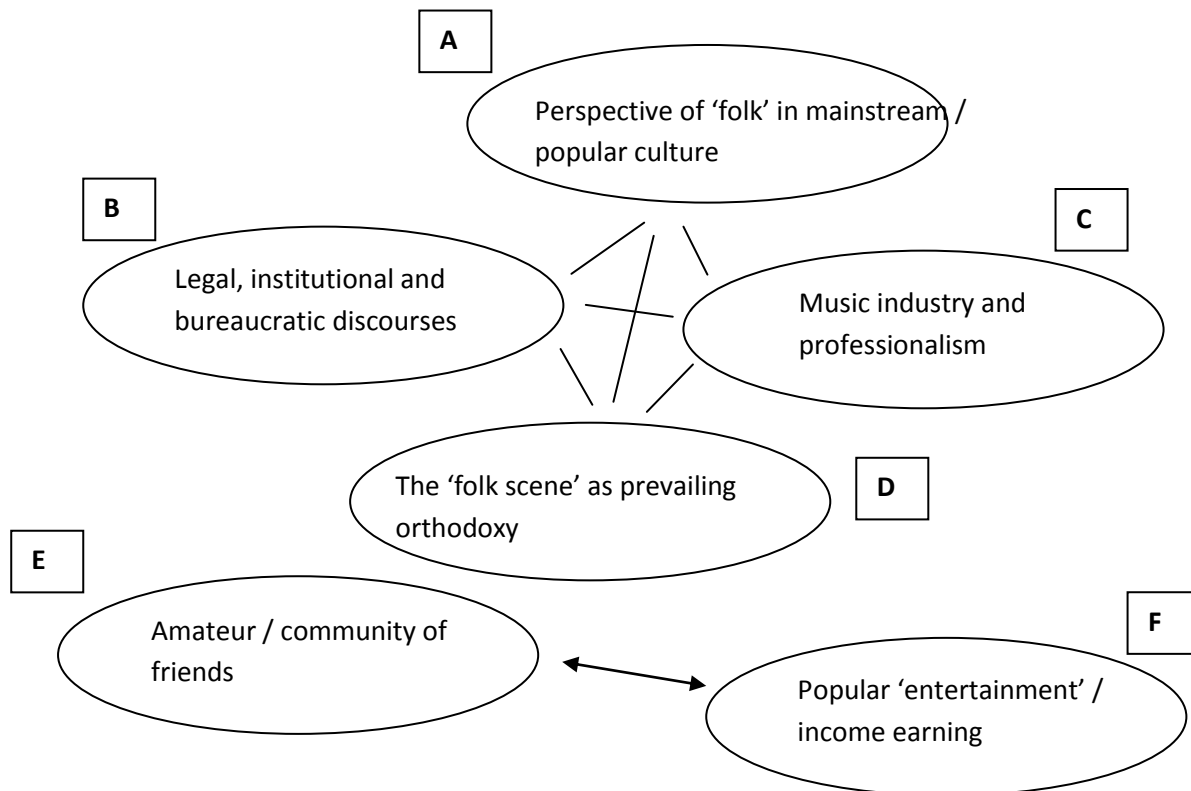
<u>Venues:</u>

1. Tump Music Club Coventry (and the Sty Folk Club), Coventry – Karen Orgill
2. Warwick Folk Club – Norman Wheatley
3. Sly Old Dogs & Friends – 'Pete Willow'

<u>Objectives of research:</u>

1. Background

     - establish motivation

     - personal history: how they got involved

     - personal objectives and gratification

     - definition of 'folk'

2. Organisation

    - routines? rituals? rationale

    - how is it organised? advance preparation

    - relationship with venue / landlord

    - business arrangements

    - budget / finance / admission / other forms of income earning

    - preferred artists (policy): guests / floor singers / session musicians

    - how are specific guests / feature artists selected?

3. Content / practice

    - characterise audiences and helpers

    - best / worst qualities of own club?

    - best / worst qualities of clubs in general?

    - in what ways does club contribute to (or reflect) folk scene?

    - relationship with other venues / events (e.g. festivals, spin-offs)

4. External institutions

    - approach to dealing with artists seeking bookings

    - approach to dealing with agents

    - media relations – specialist and mainstream

    - PRS, local authorities

    - applications for funding

    - courses, conferences, events

.../...

Questions (1):

Background:

1. What is your definition of folk music?
2. How and why did you first get involved in folk music?
3. To what extent would you describe this as a 'folk club'?
4. How did you first get involved with this club?
5. What do you enjoy about running this club?
6. In what ways has running this club benefited you personally?
7. How does this club fit in with your home life, work life and social life?
8. What reasons could you think of that might discourage you from continuing to stay involved?

Organisation:

1. Describe the basic format of the club – frequency? singers? paid guests? session or concert format? admission?
2. How is it organised? self? committee? volunteers?
3. Is there a policy for bookings, format, admission, etc.? How has this been agreed? Is it explicitly stated and disseminated?
4. Is there a policy for promoting or advertising the club?
5. Does the club have a website or other form of online presence?
6. How are the club's finances organised?
7. Does the club have anything similar to a business model?
8. How – and to what extent – do you plan ahead (e.g. for guests? dates? special features, etc.)
9. What preparation do you do for each night?
10. How did you end up with this venue?
11. Describe the relationship between the club and host venue. What does each gain from the other?

Content and practice:

1. Describe a typical night – how is it organised and structured? Is there a running order? a central figure such as a compère?
2. Is there a rationale for this? Has it changed in response to any problems / issues in the past? Should is be changed in the future?
3. To what extent are you able to keep to your 'policy' as discussed in Section 2?
4. What sort of artists typically perform at your club? (musical style? proficiency? arrangements? instrumentation?)
5. Describe your typical audience – age, gender, ethnicity, employed, family, etc.
6. How many regulars are in your audience? characterise them
7. Describe the roles of your regulars – performers, listeners, helpers
8. Broadly, what aspects of the club do you think are best, i.e. give you most satisfaction?
9. What aspects need changing / improving?
10. Hoe does your club compare with other clubs in the vicinity? Does it compete? Or fill a gap?
11. In what ways do you think that your club contributes to / reflects the local music scene? (specifically folk and other 'music scenes')
12. And the national music scene?
13. What links or contacts do you have with other clubs and music venues?

External institutions:

1. Describe how you respond to artists looking for a booking or feature spot at your venue
2. Describe how you respond to representatives or agents of artists looking for a booking or feature spot at your venue
3. Describe the level of contact you have with local or national media. How would you describe / promote your club to the media – both specialist and mainstream?
4. Are you responsible for liaison with the PRS, or is that left to the venue?
5. Do you have any direct involvement in applications for an entertainments licence or fire certificate?
6. Do you have any direct contact for any reason with the local authority, the police or ay other regulatory body?
7. Have you ever applied for (or considered applying for) funding from any relevant body, such as a local authority, arts council, the lottery?
8. Have you or any of your support team attended (or considered attending) courses, conferences or other events directly relevant to running a music venue?
9. Do you belong to any formal local or national support network (e.g. Folk Arts England)?
10. Do you recognise / take part in any informal support network (e.g. Internet user group)?

Other possible prompts:

1. What factors / conditions / contexts make life easier / more difficult for you as a club organiser?
2. What matters most to you: the quality of the music being performed or the qualities of the people taking part?
3. What is your prognosis for the future of this club – short-term? long-term?
4. What are your views on the state of folk music today – locally and nationally?

Appendix B – Facebook Survey 1.

21 Feb 2012

Are you a regular visitor to folk clubs? I'm conducting doctoral research on amateur music venues as places of social interaction – 'amateur' as in 'not a business' even though admission may be charged and guest acts paid. Venues include sessions, floor artists and singarounds as well as guest nights.

I'd be interested to hear your views on a number of questions about why you go to folk clubs and what you expect of them. I don't want to send out questionnaires ; I'm just looking for a range of opinions and experiences on a number of topics. I'll be posting individual messages/questions over the next couple of weeks on Facebook. If you'd like to respond to any of them, please do. Also, please share them with friends who you think might be interested.

I have already interviewed organisers of case study clubs. I'm now interested in the views of people who participate in the events organised by folk clubs in general – people who visit, watch, help out, perform, etc. If you are an organiser, please feel free to respond as well.

Just to emphasise – this is not research about folk music itself or the 'folk tradition'. My interest is in how music brings people together in social situations, what it means to them and what they get out of it. Folk clubs are my 'case study' for this research. Please note that I won't be quoting any respondents by name. I'm happy to answer any specific questions you may have about this research.

My first question is this: **for an enjoyable night out at the folk club, how important is the standard of music being played? Is this the most important factor or are there other things more important?**

It's a fairly open question (well, OK two questions). Brief comments or longer answers – whatever you want to say is welcome. Reply by 'comment' to this post, or message me if you'd rather not reply in the public domain. Watch this space for more questions and thanks in advance for your interest and help.

Pete Willow

<u>*(To groups)*</u>

For an enjoyable night out at the folk club, how important is the standard of music being played? Is this the most important factor or are there other things more important?

This is the first of a number of questions I'll be asking on Facebook for a doctorial research project about people's experiences of visiting folk clubs. I'd welcome any responses - please see the message on my wall for more detailed background about this research.

With thanks

Pete Willow

Appendix C – Facebook Survey 2.

22 Feb 2012

This is fantastic! Thank you for the many thoughtful, comprehensive and interesting responses posted so far to the first question of my Facebook survey of folk club visitors for my doctoral research. Many of your comments have anticipated the next question that I wanted to ask – but I will ask it anyway.

*My second question is: **What are the most important aspects of the way that a club is organised that make it a good night out for you?***

This is not so much about the music itself but the overall experience you have of a night out at a folk club and the way that it is run. Again this can include guest nights, singarounds, sessions or whatever format in which people turn up to sing/play music or to listen.

The question may appear to be targeted at those of you who do visit folk clubs. A few responses to my first question were from people who *used to* go to folk clubs but won't any more for the various reasons stated in your answers. If that's the case, you are still more than welcome to respond to this one.

I know there are plenty of published guides on how folk clubs *should* be run and I will be referring to some of these in my dissertation. But I'm more interested here in what actually works for you, whether you are audiences, performers, helpers, organisers or whatever.

Again – many thanks in advance for this. As someone who has been immersed in folk music for over 40 years, this is fascinating research and very much a labour of love. I really do appreciate your answers and comments. Depending on your responses to this second question, I may well be posting a third and final question later.

Pete Willow

PS - If you have just discovered this post and want to know more about my research, I posted a fairly detailed explanation on my wall yesterday and am happy to answer individual questions. I appreciate there are one or two that I haven't answered yet – but I will!

For groups...

*Thanks for the great responses so far from this group and others to the first question of my Facebook survey of folk club visitors for my doctoral research. Many comments have anticipated the next question that I wanted to ask – but I will ask it anyway: **What are the most important aspects of the way that a club is organised that make it a good night out for you?***

This is not so much about the music itself but the overall experience you have of a night out at a folk club and the way that it is run. Again this can include guest nights, singarounds, sessions or whatever format in which people turn up to sing/play music or to listen.

Again a more detailed discussion around this question is posted on my wall. For someone who has been immersed in folk music for over 40 years, this is fascinating research and I really do appreciate your answers and comments. Depending on your responses to this second question, I may well be posting a third and final question later.

Pete Willow

Appendix D – Facebook Survey 3.

27 Feb 2012

OK – here's the third and final question in my Facebook survey of folk club visitors for my doctoral research. I do hope many of you will be willing to answer, even though it's a slightly more personal question:

Thinking about how you live your life and what you want out of life, how significant is attending folk clubs for you as an individual?

Here I'm interested in the importance (or lack of importance?) you attach to folk clubs in such considerations as your overall lifestyle, work-life balance, social and family life, sense of personal identity, or indeed your general happiness. As before, you may base your answer on visits to guest clubs, singarounds, sessions or any format in which people turn up to sing/play music or to listen.

Feel free to respond by commenting on this post or by sending me a direct message if you prefer. Rest assured that all responses quoted in the final dissertation will not be attributed to anyone by name. For those of you who no longer visit folk clubs, I am interested in your comments on why folk clubs are not particularly important to you.

Just to reiterate: this is not a piece of research about folk music itself. It is about the performance of – and participation in – 'amateur' music as a social and cultural event. I am using folk clubs as case studies and the responses to this Facebook survey are helping me to analyse and interpret the more formal and structured interviews that I have conducted with selected folk club organisers.

I posted a more detailed explanation of this research on my wall last week and I am very happy to respond via individual messages to any questions you may have about this work.

Thanks in advance

Pete Willow

Appendix E – Poster promoting Sly Old Dogs and Friends.

Poster by Colin Squire
Photograph by Chele Willow

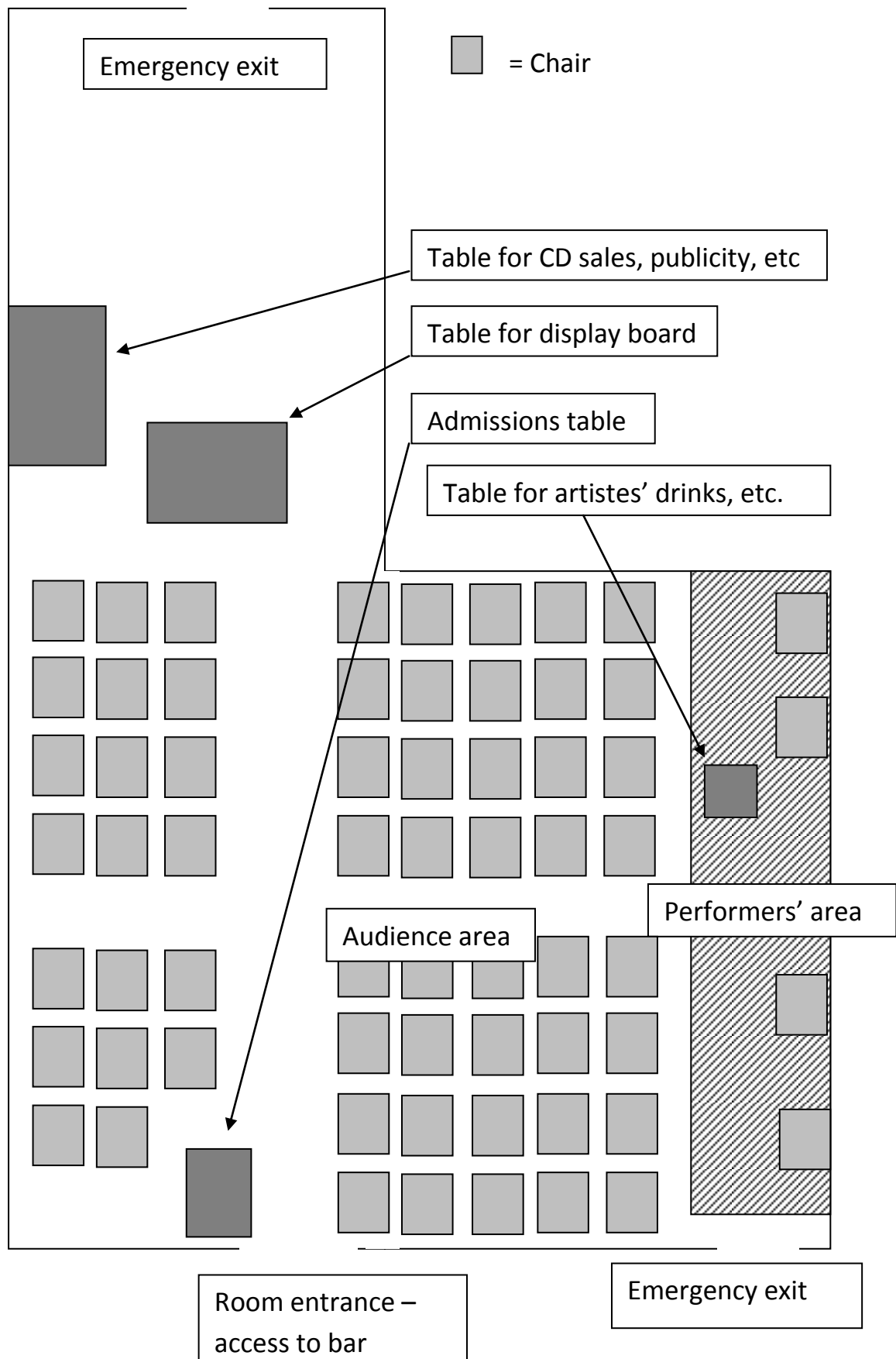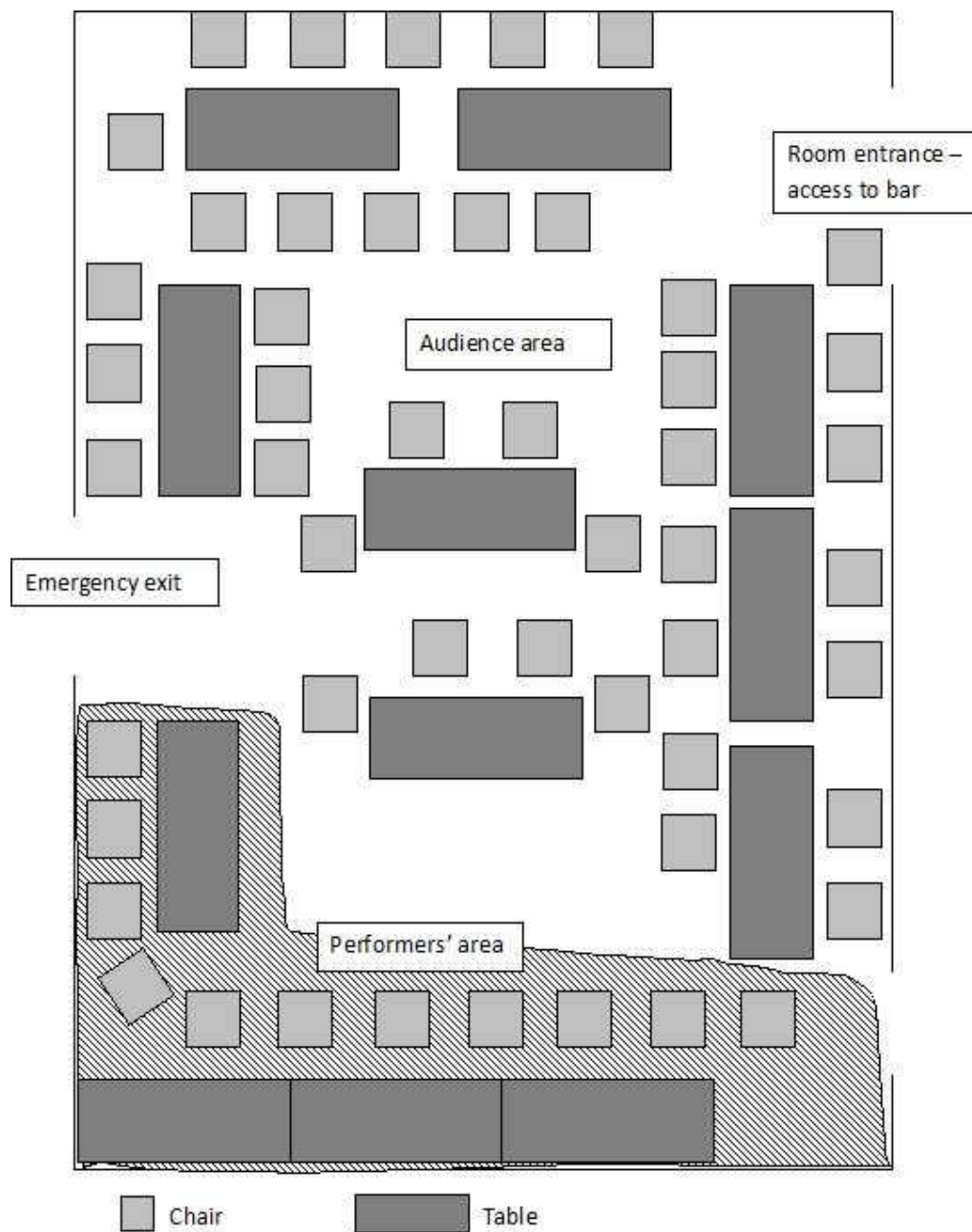**Appendix F – Facebook event post for Sly Old Dogs and Friends.**

Appendix G – The Tump Folk Club room arrangement for guest and singers' nights.
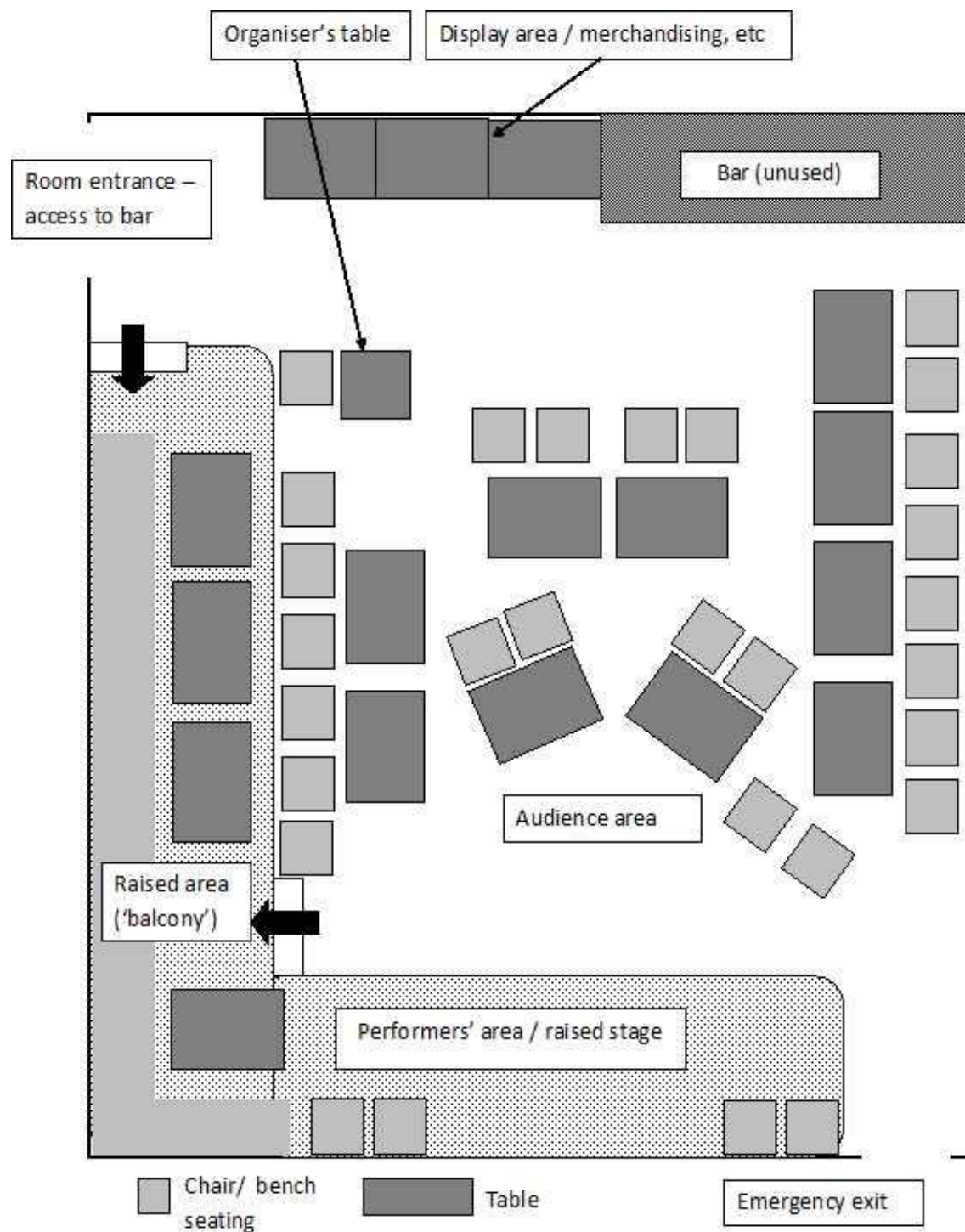
Appendix H – Warwick Folk Club room arrangement for featured guest nights

Emergency exit

= Chair

Table for CD sales, publicity, etc

Table for display board

Admissions table

Table for artistes' drinks, etc.

Performers' area

Audience area

Room entrance – access to bar

Emergency exit

Appendix I - Sly Old Dogs and Friends: typical room layout.

Room entrance – access to bar

Audience area

Emergency exit

Performers' area

☐ Chair   ▨ Table

Appendix J – Warwick Folk Club Display Board and Banner.

Photographs by Chele Willow