New York is Blue and White: Social Identity and Ritual at NYCFC

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Abstract

This thesis examines the construction of a singing culture at New York City Football Club (NYCFC) over the course of its inaugural season in Major League Soccer (MLS). An atmosphere of New York soccer fandom is sung into effect and serves as the platform for group creation. In order to capture the fluid reality of 21st Century group formation, this thesis rejects the label community, preferring to understand NYCFC fandom as an emerging social identity. Such an approach enables us to recognize the many layers of identification as part of peoples’ self-concepts. This thesis argues that NYCFC fandom, and perhaps social identities more broadly, are realized through ritual interaction in the form of normative group behavior. In this case, song is the meeting point of the converging worlds of soccer fandom and New York City, negotiating a shared musical culture that gives meaning to a new social identity.
Introduction

For millions of people across the world, singing at soccer matches is the pinnacle of musical participation. Yet these songs have attracted little attention from music scholars as non-specialist singers are far down the list of priorities of traditional academic inquiry (cf. Kyto 2011 and Jack 2012). But given the frequent themes of place and belonging, their grassroots transmission and their being a rare occurrence of 21st Century people singing together in large numbers, there is plenty of scope for inquiry. This thesis explores the formation of singing culture at the newly established New York City Football Club (hereafter NYCFC). Its four chapters address the question of group formation from separate, yet importantly connected perspectives.

Firstly, I discuss the idea of “place” as a foundation for building the group. Prior to the creation of NYCFC, none of the major sports teams representing New York City featured the word ‘city’ in its title\(^1\) despite New Yorkers casually referring to their hometown as ‘the city.’ This inclusion emphasizes the significance of the New York City concept for the cultural life of NYCFC and fans position this at the core of the singing repertoire. Yet, as Lefebvre reminds us, place extends beyond territory to the built environment and atmosphere (Lefebvre 1974/1991). At this point questions of “whose place?” and “what kind of place?” arise and soccer song is a key constructor of this. What appears is a New York soccer fan place that is a platform for belonging; it articulates both passion for the locale and global soccer fandom.

This leads us to the second chapter, which considers the context of NYCFC fandom amidst the diminished group and cultural boundaries of late modernity. These exemplify the reality of the social group in the 21st century, which Bauman refers to as ‘liquid modernity’ (2001). For Bauman, the lack of stability in our networks and the

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constantly changing natures of our roles and groups challenge individuals to create a sense of belonging in the absence of guarantees. He characterises this as an impossible quest for community (ibid: 8). Supporters at NYCFC are aware that there are no guarantees of a long-lasting and meaningful fan-identity at this club, and require mechanisms to ensure its successful creation. Here, this lack of certainty drives people to create groups that we can strongly identify with, employing many of the territorial and enduring notions of the community concept and these are manifest in the singing culture. But these values of strong identification, solidarity, longevity of association, face-to-face interaction and place-belonging are ideals more than a description of daily social and economic reality. That is why I suggest that in this late modern context we move beyond community as a category of people towards a more dynamic system of understanding groups.

This leads to the third chapter, which proposes the Social Identity Approach as a platform for analyzing groups in fluid times. This approach is centered on the intersection of multiple categorizations of the individual, known as social identities. Here, new social groups constantly emerge wherever people recognize some shared categorization as meaningful, and 21st Century life provides ample opportunity for these. Once such social identities exist, they can perpetuate certain behaviors for their members. NYCFC supporters are acutely aware of this, aware that norms emerge and that there is the opportunity to create an important fan culture for their club. Singing is the normative behavior *par excellence* in soccer culture, and NYCFC is no exception. As a new group, NYCFC fans do not have prescribed modes of behavior and so if displays of fandom are to be coordinated, supporters must create their own repertoire of songs. Within the Social Identity Approach, Self Categorization Theory discusses the mechanisms by which norms such as songs are generated and come to be
standardized. These give the group distinction, become accentuated as they gain subjective value for members and they enable individuals to recognize those who share a category through common participation.

But participation does not only signal group membership, it also perpetuates social cohesion within (and identification with) the group. This is the purpose of the final chapter, in which I offer a Durkheimian interpretation of the singing culture, suggesting that bodies synchronised in song while observing the game is a fundamental building block of the social group. These key elements of repetition, synchrony, shared focus of attention and the presence of group symbols are precisely those that the Durkheimian tradition highlights as instrumental for euphoric ritual, which in turn produces the group by realizing the bonds that connect participants. In this light, we see ritual singing at NYCFC as both the target of fandom and an agent in the creation of the group; participants share the powerful experience of performance as well as the awareness of its being shared. Bridging social identity with ritual provides a new model in which we can understand normative group behavior as ritual. Here we can see that acting in accord with group values is an embodied mechanism that enables a group to flourish even with the many overlaps of 21st Century identification.

Singing at NYCFC creates and displays unity of fans as the worlds of soccer and New York City meet. Song is active as a creator because it affords fans the opportunity to perform together, giving experiential meaning to the category of NYCFC supporter. This arises through negotiating expectations of thousands of actors with varied ideas about what kind of singing culture to be. An important subplot in this story is also disunity, where sufficiently differing conceptions about how to
experience New York City soccer fandom can give rise to conflicting singing cultures.

**Background**

Writing on soccer has found a niche in sociology, but has been remarkably absent from inquiry in musical and anthropological circles. Vidacs believes that sport is often overlooked in academic circles because it is seen as ‘trivial’ or as ‘just a game’ (2006: 336). But this clashes with the views of people who commit their social and professional lives to all kinds of sport. Further, it overlooks an important site in the performance of social roles. For example, as Markovits and Albertson state: ‘in many cases, for men in advanced industrial economies, being a sports fan is doing gender’ (2012: 124).

There is an existing literature on soccer songs that this thesis consults throughout. In keeping with my focus on group formation, much of this literature emphasizes soccer song’s fundamentally social nature. For Armstrong and Young, there is ‘no other modern-day equivalent’ as ‘a public collective expression of social and cultural identity’ (1999: 180). Other writers have emphasized that this performance is not just the expression of an identity but part of a more complicated system of fostering belonging. Being-in-the-group as fundamental to analysis of football song is not just evident in performance, but also content. As Collinson says of his ethnography into songs at Sydney FC: ‘a simple taxonomy (...) would comprise only three types of song: those that include, those that exclude and those that do both’ (2009: 20).

Soccer in the USA is growing in popularity but still falls behind American football, baseball and basketball (and depending on the region: ice hockey) in the popular imagination. Markovits and Hellerman trace this back to industrialization,
when leisure and work became meaningfully separated, creating the need for ‘organized and regularized recreation for the masses’ (2001: 13). Hence, they argue that in the US the sports popularized between 1870 and 1930 became culturally engrained, an explanation for soccer’s lingering alien status (ibid: 14). Collins extends this to larger shifts in social structure that has broadly accompanied modernity, arguing that sporting occasions were ‘designed to provide moments of ritual solidarity that previously would have been provided by religion, warfare, or political ceremony' (Collins 2004: 59).

NYCFC

In 2013, Major League Soccer (MLS) announced the establishment of NYCFC with the ambition that it would compete from the 2015 season onwards. The franchise was to be a joint venture from the owners of Manchester City, an English Premier League club, and the New York Yankees, the famous baseball team based in the Bronx (MLS Soccer Staff 2013). So from boardroom planning, backed by huge finances, a new soccer team entered the New York sporting landscape with ambitions for huge cultural significance. This happened in spite of the fact that there was already an MLS team representing the area: the New York Red Bulls. That the Red Bulls’ stadium is in New Jersey has dissuaded many New Yorkers from making the 40-minute train ride to support them, with NYCFC providing a welcome alternative.

At least until the end of 2016, NYCFC play their home matches at Yankee Stadium while the powers-that-be search for a fit site to build a soccer stadium. This provides the site of much of my participant observation, in particular the designated supporters sections\(^2\) on the furthest corner from the luxury suites that are behind the

\(^2\) The orange section in the appendix
baseball pit. When I first used the website to book tickets, I was given the following warning:

The Supporters Sections (GA 235 to GA 238) are General Admission sections that are filled with passionate soccer fans that will stand, sing, and chant for all 90 minutes of the match. Other individuals, flags, banners, and displays may obstruct views. These sections may not suit children due to standing and adult language. If this atmosphere is not something you are comfortable with please do not choose seats in these sections.³

Needless to say, I was not dissuaded. The supporters’ section is technically the terrain of the only official supporters group for NYCFC: the Third Rail.⁴ But despite the organizational success of the Third Rail, not everybody in the supporters’ section likes the idea of such a large supporters group and this area is occupied by many members of unofficial groups who do not consider themselves to be Third Rail members. Other groups such as Los Templados and Blue Ladies have sought to integrate their smaller units within a larger performative narrative of singing and drumming in the supporters’ section, while groups such as Hearts of Oak and NYCFC Hooligans have sought to separate from the mainstream. This interplay of subgroups has been a central feature of the creation of a diverse singing culture at NYCFC.

One important feature of Yankee stadium is that it is a baseball ground, not designed for any kind of football. Hence, it has an open shape that allows large amounts of sound, particularly from the uncovered cheaper sections, to disappear. This means that even if thousands of people wanted to sing the same song, getting started together is a phenomenal task. A small group of committed fans created the system of

⁴ Whose name suggests they (we) wish to power NYCFC like the 3rd rail powers the subway.
“capos”\textsuperscript{5} which tries to support unity of songs across the supporters’ section. Here, a handful of designated people stand between the aisles and in key areas to communicate with each other which song is about to start, so they can begin energetically and ensure as many people as possible are on the same page.

**Methods**

My research has used a wide variety of methods since I became aware of NYCFC in late December 2014. I found and joined the Third Rail, and attended meetings regularly from January 2015. These included discussions of financial and technical matters, as well as explicit discussions of how to create a fan culture. To my delight, at the very first meeting I attended there was a sing-off where several members vied to promote their own compositions. I attended home matches throughout the opening season (from March to October), and some away games, participating as much as possible in the growing singing culture. Likewise, for matches taking place further afield I joined fellow supporters at watch-parties at bars in Manhattan, where singing erupts in a more intimate setting. When the capos group formed I quickly jumped on board and attended several smaller meeting where we would discuss the highs and lows of the previous weekend’s fan performance (while almost never discussing a single detail of the on-the-field action). In these settings I have been able to directly interview and casually chat with passionate fans who have been especially active in forming aspects of this supporters’ culture. Though, a considerable amount of useful information directing me towards pertinent issues has been from internet comments, primarily on Facebook, Reddit and the NYCFC and Third Rail supporters’ forums.

\textsuperscript{5} A capo is a leader (from the Italian for ‘head’)}
Position of this Research

The focus of my research positions this thesis in a line of descent from works such as De Nora’s ‘Music in Everyday Life’ (2000), and Small’s ‘Musicking’ (1998), which both give life to richness of human musical experience far beyond the realm of professional, trained, or specialist musicians. The added factor of internet culture as a resource moves this line of research forward. A further forbearer is Finnegan’s landmark ‘The Hidden Musicians,’ where she reminds us of the need to acknowledge both the playful and serious ends of performance because it ‘forms a recurrent theme in ritual’ (2007: 338). Additionally, urban ethnomusicology has expanded in significance in recent decades and my research fits within this broader canon of work (Reyes 2007). Lastly, Turino’s ‘Music as Social Life’ offers the categories of presentational and participatory to describe musical performance, a particularly useful distinction for discussing non-professional musics (2008: 26). Naturally, this thesis deals with the latter as participation is paramount (see chapter 4) and there is no explicit idea of an audience for the performances.

But, as I hope this thesis shows by employing supposedly incompatible influences such as functionalism, post-structuralism and the scientific method, cliques in academia present more conceptual trouble than they are worth. Hence, this thesis seeks to advance ethnomusicology by tying its internal developments in urban and everyday musics to an understanding of participatory singing as ritual, socially normative behavior.
Chapter 1: Place, Space and Soccer Song

“Place” is a central topic in the study of soccer songs. It is both a prominent emic category in which virtually every song makes note of the geographical uniqueness of the team, and an etic category in which writers have sought to situate soccer fan experience within broader narratives on the local and the global. Definitions of “place” and “space” vary between sociologists and human geographers but for present purposes, place is ‘an arena of action that is at once physical and historical, social and cultural’ (Casey 2001: 683). As such, my use of the term “place” encompasses the three categories in Lefebvre’s (1974/1991) conception of produced space: the physical environment, its mental associations and the space as it is experienced, though without firm commitment to their independence. Song is implicated in place construction because everything from the musical genre to language of the lyrics shapes the lived experience of the physical space in which it occurs. This can be both welcoming and excluding as the environment becomes transformed into an arena of place with discernable values.

Place has a long history of significance in soccer. Bale traces this back to the development of the game in the 18th and 19th centuries where matches would be played between competing villages quite literally (1993a: 123). In the modern game, city names still dominate in teams across the globe, which infuses support for the team with attachment to the locale. Major League Soccer has created each of its 20 teams with the name of “their” city, as was the case in Japan where a new elite league also emerged in the 90’s (Horne and Manzenreiter 2008: 363). Place and soccer also integrate at the level of the physical environment. Clay notes that the football field is often used in media reports to help describe complex environments, rendering it a ‘unit of psycho-geographic size and shape’ (1990: 5). Additionally, recent discourse
on placelessness has featured in the soccer literature, suggesting that stadium homogenization and bourgeoisification have diminished the significance of place (Bale 1993a: 127-130). After reviewing the relevant literature, I explore the role of song in the creation of place at NYCFC. In this case, song creates place in articulating a New York oriented soccer fan environment, extending passion for local territory into a striking performance that shapes the lived atmosphere. Place, in this sense, functions not as an explicit territorial notion with clear physical boundaries but a principle by which fans can create a common fabric of loyalty and experience; the foundation for group formation.

**Topophilia**

Tuan coined the phrase “topophilia” to refer to ‘all the human being’s affective ties with the material environment,’ whereby we develop a special relationship to certain features of our physical surroundings (1974: 93). Elsewhere, he expresses this succinctly: ‘what begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value’ (Tuan 1977: 6). Bale uses the notion of topophilia to describe the relationship of soccer fans to their “home” stadium, whereby feelings of passion extend to physical structure itself (Bale 1993b: 64). Davis extends the principle of topophilia further, to a ‘love of home’, a more appropriate level for the expression of fandom in the modern era where stadiums are demolished and rebuilt, expanding with the ambitions of the club (2015: 430). We see a similar theme in Pratt and Salter’s claim that support for the team is a fundamental expression of place-based loyalty, where what is being celebrated is ‘the name of the home town or city’ but also ‘the supporters as loyal and worthy representatives of it’ (in Bale 1993b: 58).
**Placelessness?**

Yet many football writers note the challenges that globalization and homogenized stadiums present to a sense of place (Bale 1993a: 127-130; Clark 2006: 500; Hughson 1998). Relph critiques globalization’s thirst for generic buildings, suggesting it participates in “the casual eradication of distinctive places and the making of standardized landscapes that results from an insensitivity to the significance of place” (1976: preface). This “placelessness” as the loss of distinctiveness has flourished as a literary concept in recent decades. Neilson describes new stadiums as ‘sports saucers’ that are ‘defining a non place, rather an anti-place, hostile to the bounds imposed by locale and history’ (in Bale 1993b: 73). On face value, there is some appeal to these claims of diminishing significance of certain aspects of place. Yankee Stadium, in common with airports and shopping malls, is a web of signs directing you towards the entrance, exit, bathroom, merchandise stores and food outlets. Such features of globalized anonymity are exactly what Relph describes as the ‘manifestation of placelessness’ (1976: 118). On my first trip I was taken aback by the long lines of people waiting to buy the club’s merchandise, the cleanliness of the bathrooms and even the temporary playing surface. But at no point did I feel that this environment sought to ‘collapse individual differences into a standardized identity’, as the postmodern “anti-place” critics had warned me (Gottschalk and Salvaggio 2015: 12). My findings suggest that the “insensitivity to the significance of place” argument fails to recognize that users, in this case NYCFC fans, create the most meaningful dimensions of place.

As I entered for the first home game the sound of the line 4 subway rattled past and all around Yankee Stadium I saw enormous portraits of legends of the city’s sporting history. Before the start, New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio gave a brief
speech to the sell-out crowd. This was inaudible from the supporters’ section, as all around me fans erupted into chanting ‘We Want a Stadium’ to the melody of Verdi’s ‘La Donna È Mobile,’ a staple tune in global soccer song. Here we were in a 21st century baseball stadium modelled on its 20th century predecessor, ignoring the mayor’s speech at the historic first MLS game in New York City, using soccer song to protest that the authorities should approve a soccer-specific stadium so we can call it our own. This speaks of a sense of not really belonging in Yankee Stadium and the thirst to ground NYCFC in its own physical space. Even something that represents New York City’s sporting history as much as this is inadequate to fulfil the requirements of “home”.

The longing for a stadium has been evident in virtually every discussion or meeting that I have attended, where rumours about prospective sites spread like wildfire before being quickly quashed. Fan and sports journalist Nick Chavez sums up this excitement it in his blog: ‘just imagine what New York City FC and its support might be like with it’s own soccer-specific stadium in the City’ (Chavez 2015). This discussion shows that even a new generic stadium, so long as it is within the five boroughs of New York City, is preferable to being the paying guests of the Yankees and supports my argument that the affective relationships with our surroundings are generated through action, in this case song in soccer fandom.

This brings us to an apparent complication in the position of place in soccer songs. Collinson observes that while rival groups of supporters ‘thrive on incommensurability’, across the world these supporters ‘create their identities by drawing on the same, limited and perhaps even generic song hoard: as a result difference begins to sound a great deal like sameness’ (2009: 22). He refers to the

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6 See accompanying materials: We Want a Stadium
many melodies that reoccur among supporters of various teams whereby even a single word could be changed to make it team-specific. This begs the question, if we create place through soccer song, do we not undermine our own distinctiveness by participating in a standardized repertoire? But this is not a mindless attack on cultural grey-out. Collinson argues that this is a conscious act and that ‘these songs may even be thought to articulate a local and a global fan identity simultaneously, as fans connect local and distant spaces within global soccer culture’ (ibid: 15). The negotiation of the local and the global is part of the fans’ identification with a more complex sense of place than simply the relationship with immediate physical territory as fans on the other side of the world revel in similar musical acts. This paves the way for an understanding of place as a site of identification in which actors’ personal behaviors define significant boundaries as much as externally defined geo-political ones.

This interplay is also expressed in the most common melodic framework for compositions in the supporters’ section at NYCFC: the tune of the chant most famously performed as ‘let’s go Yankees’, a four-note phrase comprising a repeated minor 3rd descent. It is a characteristic baseball chant, one that embellishes the NYCFC soundscape with an all-American pulse. Its improvised use in soccer ranges from ‘Let’s go New York’, to ‘We can’t hear you’ towards the drowned-out opposition supporters and ‘you’re a diver’ towards players accused of feigning injury. Here, as in other American chants in the repertoire, these bring elements from broader USA sporting culture and integrate them into a New York soccer fandom, providing further grounding to the sense of place that is created and experienced.

Bale dismisses the placelessness theorists as ‘elitist’, stressing that ‘meaningful human encounters can surely happen in the most soulless of spaces’ (Bale 2005: 8).
We can easily imagine different affective relationships between a) the McDonalds where I ate and b) the McDonalds where I first met my wife. Recall that Relph’s objection to a standardized physical environment is premised on overlooking the significance of place. But if human action and interaction generate meaning in place, rather than structural features of our surroundings, then there is little reason to reify superficial diversity in architecture. Casey highlights that while of course human action occurs in some physical space, so does everything else; ‘it has no privileged relationship to that space’ (2001: 685). In fact, he goes on to argue, the more generic the surroundings, the more pressure we humans have to create meaning (ibid).

Now we can ask: in a post-industrial city, what could be more effective than music in creating place and demarcating space? As Atkinson comments in his study of sound in the urban environment: ‘the sound of a neighbor’s music does not have to be loud, to compromise our sense of autonomy in the domestic setting’ and this effect is no less pronounced in the most soulless apartment building (Atkinson 2007: 1908). This realization has gained currency among policy makers across the world, with the emergence of the “Manilow Method” of playing unfashionable music to deter loitering youths (Cook 2013: 224). From this we can quite easily imagine the consequences of song in the stadium context as the auditory creation of territory. Therefore, we have a potentially powerful tool to structure stadium worlds into meaningful environments, as has been commented on by other ethnographers of soccer song to whom I now turn.

**Singing Place in Soccer**

While phenomena such as plastic seats and out-sourced fast food can make modern stadiums feel placeless, place and different places can be expressed against
this backdrop. In his research at Scunthorpe United in England, Clark found that ‘supporters use songs to construct their own affective place-related collective identities’ (2006: 494). This is evident in the many songs that refer to the club’s hometown either explicitly or with reference to its regional attributes such as Scunthorpe’s historically significant iron industry. He notes the standardization of stadiums across the world as a potential obstacle to the significance of the local, but says:

Chanting is one such way of transcending these boundaries to create place out of this placelessness (…) the ritual performance of song within that context is integral in establishing and reinforcing this symbolic construction of an affective topographic identity (ibid: 500).

This is consistent with Hughson’s findings at Sydney United, where members of a supporters’ group ‘found a metaphorical space within the soccer stadium to construct a unique social identity’ (Hughson 1998: 403). He refers to the Bad Blue Boys, a group of young men who follow the team previously called “Sydney Croatia”. The story of this club illustrates nicely the dialectic of place-affect and placelessness in modern soccer. Soccer in Australia has a complex place-history since the majority of professional teams emerged from local (migrant) clubs with ethnic affiliations to South-East Europe. An initial ban on ‘ethnically and nationally based names and symbols’ was attempted in the 70’s, but was rescinded after only six years in order to re-ignite interest in the competition (Skinner et al 2008: 397). Here, the reintroduction of ethnicity as a marker of place was explicitly used to increase interest in fandom. In the 90’s, three clubs including Sydney Croatia were expelled after refusing new regulations on national symbols. They were reinstated in the league having agreed to ‘modernize’ their logos (ibid: 398). Later, these regulations were extended to a ban on
bringing national flags at matches. Hughson stresses the anger that this causes the Bad Blue Boys who wish to be the bearers of ‘a tradition of Croatian masculinity’ and not a corporate identity. He points out that they subvert this by singing loudly ‘C-R-O-A-T-I-A’ from the stands, and chanting Pavlic’s name accompanied by Nazi salutes (Hughson 1998: 405, 2000: 12). At both Sydney United and Scunthorpe United, we see the struggle for a territorial grounding to group identity. This occurs where supporters wish to create a sense of place that expands on a locale, while factors ranging from stadium designs to regulations on the team name are conspiring against them.

_Soccer, Exclusion, Place_

Actors create place in the stadium and this inevitably brings the question: whose place? Bale notes that fans tend to view the game from the same spot over many years, with diverse characteristics emerging between sections of a single stadium, and song is often at the center of this (Bale 1993b: 68-9). While in many cases, such as at NYCFC, this gives rise to supporters’ sections and designated louder areas, it also produces an uglier side. Bains talks of Wolverhampton Wanderers fans singing anti-Asian songs in protest at the Asian owners in the 80’s, and how he responded by moving to a ‘safer’ part of the ground to view future games (Bains and Johal 1999: 97). This theme is touched upon by Collinson, who suggests that ‘football songs establish a rhetorical territory’ that is capable of generating a sense of hostility in parts of the stadium (2009: 17). Citing this, Caudwell claims that song is intimately connected to ‘the malignant sounds of sexism, racism and homophobia [that] are palpable within football stadia’ (2011: 126). This topic is of ongoing significance; in January 2016 FIFA issued fines to the soccer associations of five nations as

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7 The leader of Independent State of Croatia, a puppet state in fascist occupied Yugoslavia
punishment for their fans’ frequent use of homophobic chants (BBC Sport 2016). To those who regularly hear normalized casual hate-speech, it is extremely hard to accept the idea that we are all equal citizens in a placeless landscape.

For the most part, the supporters’ section at NYCFC has not been the site of hate speech, though there are some notable exceptions. After the first home game in March, Chance Michaels (then leader of the largest supporters’ group: Third Rail) took to Facebook with the following complaint:

I've heard reports that somebody was throwing around racial and homophobic slurs. Once and for all, this is NOT ACCEPTABLE. It's against our Code of Conduct, it will get you tossed from Yankee Stadium, but more importantly it's not respectful to your fellow human beings.

While I think more could be done for a safer and more inclusive fandom, this attitude itself demonstrates the presence of place and the active role of sound and song. After all, we are saying that some acts of singing are welcome and some are not, precisely because of the kind of place we seek to build.

Building Place

Other writers further the idea of place as a constructed unifier more than an expression of tangible reality. In her ethnographic study of Besiktas fans in Istanbul, Kytö argues that the twenty-first century metropolis is not comprised of ‘coherent place-oriented communities’ and therefore ‘shared meanings and tacit knowledge [are] more important than spatial categories’ in understanding group boundaries (2011: 79).

8 While racist, sexist and even ‘foul’ language are explicitly prohibited in the NYCFC fan code of conduct, homophobia is not mentioned (NYCFC Fan Code of Conduct)

9 The Third Rail Facebook page, accessed March 21 2015.
This line of reasoning moves towards understanding place within the realm of the common definition of social actors. For Giulianotti and Robertson, globalization has deterritorialized ‘the cultural, ethnic and national frameworks through which identities are constructed’ (2006: 174). They suggest that it is not fruitful to think of soccer identities on overtly place-based terms, suggesting that modern-day groups experience the local as ‘a bundle of social relations’ that is anchored in common group categorization (ibid). They discussed the changing relationships to the Glasgow teams faced by Scottish fans in North America, highlighting the diminishing hatred between fans of the rival teams in their new context (ibid: 188). Here, migration has removed the immediacy of territory but not removed the affective relationship that fans hold to their club, their stadium and their fellow fans.

Jack (2012) notes that the types of songs being selected for inclusion are also a constituent factor in the creation of supporters’ sense of place. In his study of Shamrock Rovers’ ‘Ultras’ fan group in Dublin, he found much resistance to the appropriation of supporters’ culture from England. He interprets this as ‘a conscious rejection of the presence of English culture in Ireland. The choice to adopt a style of singing and support from different areas of the world makes a statement about the Ultras’ rejection of certain aspects of modern Irish society’ (Jack 2012: 87). Here, we see not only the repertoire of songs as indicative of broader cultural affiliation, but also the absence of certain songs and song-types as conscious decisions to control group image using territorial criteria.

The process of constructing a common fabric of identity in which social interpretations of place are central is at the core of generating loyalty for a new team. In fact, in the NYCFC repertoire songs that explicitly celebrate New York City is by
far the dominant category. At NYCFC, supporters have chosen to follow them and not New York Red Bulls, who play their home matches 40 minutes from New York City in the state of New Jersey. This is expressed openly in one of the most popular songs, ‘Come on You Boys in Blue’:

Come on you boys in blue

New York is blue and white

In establishing ‘city’ as a signifier for NYCFC, it provides a stark contrast to the rival ‘Red Bulls’ in so far as one refers to place and the other to a global corporation. Further, the cry of ‘New York is blue and white’ directly stakes claim for cultural ownership of the region, as far as soccer is concerned. Indeed, this matter was taken to a public vote on the eve of the first match between the two teams, where the empire state building was to be lit in either NYCFC blue or Red Bulls red (MLSsoccer.com 2015). The hotly territorial grounding for this sense of place exemplifies fans’ desires to emphasize the local, even in a world of diminished place oriented boundaries. But we cannot simply interpret this as displaying loyalty to the physical locale at the expense of all else. The song itself is widely used in world football fandom, most prominently as ‘Come on you bhoys in green’ at Glasgow Celtic and ‘Come on you boys in red’ at PSV Eindhoven. So while we can discern a strong desire to localize the fan experience at NYCFC, it is simultaneously part of a global network that has its

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10 Followed by songs that encourage the team and antagonize the opposition
11 See accompanying materials: Come On You Boys in Blue
own broader conventions. Hence the need to be alert to the complexity of the sense of place that is generated: one that in part seeks to divide locally while uniting globally.

Summary

At NYCFC, fans have developed a repertoire of songs that grounds group identity in the New York City locale. While territory is a starting point for the construction of place, it expands to incorporate features of broader soccer and USA sports fandom, seen in the use of songs and melodies from the larger canons of world soccer and American sports. As such, there is a sense of place that is simultaneously defined by region (New York City) and cultural practice (participation in soccer song). So while global fandom may appear to undermine our attachment to the specificity of our surroundings with generic song forms and stadia, such an absence has not been conspicuous in my experience at NYCFC. Here, interactions of fans create the sense of attachment to the locale and the physical environment and the placelessness discourse fails to account for this.
Chapter 2. Beyond Community: NYCFC and Late Modernity

'Just as community collapses, identity is invented' (Young 1999: 164).

Place and the love of the city are key features of the emerging NYCFC fan identity. This is an important dimension of a controversial term in the soccer literature that I turn to now: community. In this chapter I discuss “community” and argue that despite its ubiquity, it may be best understood as allegorical in its modern use. That is to say that it reveals important social ideals through its allusion to identification, solidarity, face-to-face interaction, place-belonging and the longevity of relations, but does not accurately describe the conditions of the modern groups it names. These groups live in times of late modernity, where the movement of capital, culture and people render the romantic notion of bounded communities obsolete. But it still has a vicarious presence as it motivates people to pursue precisely these ideals listed above. I argue that our longing for the kinds of interactions central to “community” propel us to form groups that we strongly identify with. This is why we must move beyond “community” and towards “social identity” as a more flexible categorization that is fit for the 21st Century. As I show below, the developing singing culture of NYCFC exemplifies this situation in its desire to realize a strong, interactive, long-lasting and topophilic group and in the difficulties it encounters along the way.

Community in the Soccer Literature

The term ‘community’ features prominently in the academic literature on soccer. This is typically to describe solidarity among supporters, which at its most intimate can show a familial environment. For example, Hughson discusses the history of Australia’s supporters’ culture, in which newly arrived migrants from diverse backgrounds formed clubs on ethnic lines. He claims that ‘during the postwar era,
some southern European migrants have used the sport to foster community spirit and maintain a social network for members of respective diasporas’ (Hughson 1998: 405). The direct link here, between soccer culture and having a social network, is present in other cases that do not depend on pre-existing ethnic groups. For example, Kytö found that in Turkey, ‘supporting a team is one of the most common ways of constructing one’s communal identity’ (2011: 80). In this case, the alienation faced by migrants in Turkey’s rapid urbanization was overcome by joining a network of fellow supporters, thus fostering a sense of safety in community spirit. Horne and Manzenreiter discuss policy making in Japan, where they found soccer to feature prominently in debates aimed at reviving and constructing communities (2008: 361). Of course, this does not depend on large-scale social upheaval, as Bale notes more generally: ‘the football club provides a potent force for community identification’ (Bale 1993b: 93). This is impressive given that in many cases the pools of supporters are from diverse socio-economic worlds. Further, this is not confined to the era of rapid industrialization. Blackshaw suggests that post-industrial societies in particular should see surging significance for social realms like soccer fandom. This is heightened because we live in times of such freedom of movement and long-term uncertainty ‘that professional football, with the durability of its city clubs (…) would come to play such an important role for its fans’ cultural identities’ (2008: 336).

But the problem I wish to address in the light of my research at NYCFC is that such sociability and group identification might not be most accurately described as community, given that this term suggests very high levels of everyday economic interdependence. Kytö tries to avoid this problem by suggesting the Çarşısı supporters’ group at Besiktas ‘functions like an acoustic community’ (2011: 77). This implies a deliberate adaptation of the term and offers exciting possibilities of an acoustemology
of soccer. But this emblematic use does not overcome the problem that the everyday interconnection of a community is absent from such groups and in this chapter I suggest it is an important absence.

Brown, Mellor and Crabbe imply that it is not so important how academia conceives of these groups (as communities or otherwise), given that governments and the broader public still employ “community” widely in sporting contexts. They state: ‘the point is that, whether theorists find the term useful or not, ‘community’ continues to be an important and defining ‘conceptual reality’” (2006: 169). That is to say that people still experience meaningful connections in their social networks and these are widely interpreted as communities, even if commonalities between cases are scarce or imprecise. Blackshaw rebuffs this strongly, suggesting that they have not used the word community to reflect a reality, but:

it is rather ideological in that it tends to ‘fix’ a particular kind of meaning to different and diverse practices and activities and identities, and kinds of belonging (Blackshaw 2008: 330).

At this point we may decide that a social group only needs to display certain features such as high levels of identification and solidarity or attachment to a place and the sense of permanence in order to be meaningfully described as a community. This would be along the lines of Wittgenstein’s discussion of the concept “game”, in which there are many overlapping features of games, but none are strictly essential to the definition (1968: 31 [PI66]). I suggest that this is unsatisfactory precisely because “community” is the promise of more than any incomplete combination of these. Without this, the term is empty because any social group will combine these factors to a greater or lesser extent. But these features are still prominent for 21st Century groups such as fans of NYCFC and I address this in light of discourse on community.
This brings us to an important point that presents a challenge to the modern ethnographer writing after the end of ‘the convenient fiction that mapped cultures onto places and peoples’ (Gupta and Ferguson 1992: 8). Late modernity, or Bauman’s ‘liquid modernity’, refers to the constantly changing make-up of our social and economic worlds. Following the rise of capitalism, liberalism and industrialization, our lives are so removed from a sense of place and stability that it is now down to the individual to create their own sense of safety (Bauman 2001). Our economic networks are not embedded in our day-to-day social experiences, and thus we find an absence of community. Indeed, communitarian philosophers have long argued ‘that liberalism threatens communities by fragmenting them into a mass of competing individuals’ (Sayers 2007: 86). Such heightened competition is the alienation and every-one-for-themselves economy that Bauman describes.

Naturally, this presents a problem for our sense of belonging to a group. Blackshaw goes so far as to say that as inhabitants of late modernity, we are ‘shape-shifters whose identities lie not within [us], so much as in the current form [we] assume at any particular moment and in [our] ability to metamorphose’ (2008: 333). This highlights the challenges faced by the individual as we seek to establish ourselves in a turbulent social world. Such reasoning posits that consciousness of our loss of community drives us towards self-creation and group formation; we must decide both who to be and who to be with if we are to feel a sense of belonging. Problematically though, self-creation must be never-ending in order to preserve its key promise: freedom to choose. Identity must therefore be a ‘truly ‘until further notice’ kind of identity’ (Bauman 2001: 64). It would be impossible to reach an end product in self-creation because a fixed self could no longer create or choose and so
choice undermines the stability of community. Dissatisfaction with one’s current self or group membership can be overcome through deliberate change. Such temporal limitation to membership is a nail in the coffin of a meaningful notion of community as it presents serious challenges to the longevity of groups.

Crucially, with late modernity we see *both* the absence of life-long spatially defined communities *and* the explosion of the term ‘community’ to describe a large variety of groups. We casually speak of Muslim communities and Black communities as well as blogging or motorcycle communities. Bauman argues that it is senseless for groups to claim to be communities because a spoken-of community is ‘a contradiction in terms’ (2001: 12). He argues that for a community to be meaningful it must be grounded in day-to-day experiences and not summoned by rhetoric. Indeed, this position is shared by scholars such as Hobsbawm who states: ‘never was the word “community” used more indiscriminately (...) than in the decades when communities in the sociological sense became hard to find in real life’ (in Blackshaw 2008: 327).

As in many other fields, the academic literature on soccer fandom has been keen to employ Anderson’s (1983/2006) concept of “imagined communities” (Nash 2000: 468; van Bemel 2012: 31-2; Jack 2012: 54; Hobsbawm 1990/2012: 143; Horne and Manzenreiter 2008: 373). Anderson himself expressed the need for caution with the term, claiming ‘imagined communities’ have become ‘a pair of words from which the vampires of banality have by now sucked almost all the blood’ (2006: 207). While using this term clearly runs the risk of amalgamating too many diverse experiences, I highlight it to situate its relevance for the dynamism of modern identification. As Blackshaw notes, these “communities” are imagined not simply in the sense Anderson describes (because they cannot meet all their fellow members), but also because ‘the demands and opportunities required by modern living mean that “imagined
communities” are constantly in the process of disembedding and re-embedding’ (2008: 331). This is because we have many networks of links that both change over time and become active with their relevance to the situation in which we find ourselves. For example, a Christian fan does not abandon any group membership between Saturday at the stadium and Sunday at the church.

Here we can begin to see evidence that the term “community” in its modern context is being used to describe what can more simply be considered the social group. Late modernity has lent itself to (sometimes zealous) analysis with labels of “imagined communities” because individuals have many overlapping group identifications in which everyday interaction can be minimal. Tajfel uses the term “social identities,” rather than communities, and argues that these are best understood as ‘processes’ rather than ‘static’, comprising ‘a complex sequence of appearances and disappearances’ (Tajfel 1982: 485). This appears to be a more fruitful ground for understanding football supporters’ interrelations, given the presence of group identity issues more than those of daily economics. Yet it is noteworthy that our obsession with the term “community” may reveal our sense of loss at the absence of its completeness and can be seen as evidence of our desire for groups that display greater territoriality, solidarity and longevity.

Brown, Crabbe and Mellor explicitly critique Bauman with regards to soccer communities. Their research finds that soccer support can be ‘grounding, structuring, deep forms of sociation that bring true meaning to people’s lives,’ and infer that this should be impossible if we are all in liquid modernity (2006: 172). They refer to Holt’s discussion of England where ‘football clubs are historically one of the principal agents through which collective social identities are created and reinforced’ (ibid: 161). But I feel these attitudes are mutually complimentary rather than contradictory.
On my reading liquid modernity does not exclude the meaningful experiences of togetherness and face-to-face encounter, in fact, one should be pushed towards this kind of atmosphere precisely because of the kinds of alienation experienced by the fans in England, Australia and Turkey cited above. Brown, Crabbe and Mellor themselves provide Giulianotti’s discussion of early soccer culture’s ability to give ‘the kind of affective tie to a specific locality that one finds in more traditional and localist societies’ (in ibid: 162). They state: ‘according to this line of thinking, football clubs developed links with communities because they helped to sustain the close face-to-face, geographic, affective communities that were under threat during modernity’ (ibid). Just like the example they provide from a century ago, our present reality encourages us to create and sustain social networks amidst the chaos, wherein the guarantees of community are conspicuously absent. As Bauman puts it, ‘gone is the certainty that ‘we will meet again’, that we will be meeting repeatedly and for a very long time to come – and that therefore society can be presumed to have a long memory’ (Bauman 2001: 47). In the following section I present the late modern context of NYCFC and discuss the importance of community and its parts for this new singing culture.

**Liquid Modernity and NYCFC: Sushi at the Soccer?**

As I first wondered around Yankee Stadium I saw that besides the hotdog and burger stands, there was also a sushi stand. This concept of sushi at the soccer was striking because it represented the coming together of two of globalization’s biggest phenomena in the most unlikely of settings. Poignantly, these are both examples of globalisation that are not Americanization, suggesting liquid modernity pays little heed to the 20th Century’s world order.
The growth of soccer in the United States is a good example of the diminution of our perceived cultural boundaries. This itself is made up of several factors such as migration of people from Latin America and Europe, the growth of Major League Soccer (MLS) and easy access to world soccer on TV and online. But the prevalence of liquid modernity does not end there. The MLS is structured without the pyramid system traditional to world football – there is no relegation for teams who finish last. This means that supporters can back their team to compete for the title each year, without having the longevity of their loyalties tested by relegation. Further, new teams are created and enter immediately to the highest level of prominence. This has led to the possibility of world-cup winners such as Andrea Pirlo and David Villa playing for a team that did not exist a year previously. The fact that institutions can rise to cultural significance so quickly after they appear is evidence of significant fluidity in our present era.

The situations of the fans also attest to a liquid modern context for this supporters’ culture. By the time of NYCFC’s first match, its principal supporters’ group, the Third Rail, already had over 1700 members. Chance Michaels, the first president of the group, told me of his delight upon hearing of the new franchise (NYCFC), stressing the existing team in the region, New York Red Bulls, had lacked emphasis on a New York City fan base (personal communication, Chance Michaels, 11th January 2015, NY, NY). In his words: ‘they didn’t seem to have a ton of interest in the city itself. And, to be honest, I think the city kind of returned that lack of interest’ (in Klein 2015). He told the New York Post: ‘A lot of us are trying to create a community we will pass down to our kids’ (in Fleming 2015). He claims that members of the Third Rail are mostly people who have been football ‘fans for many
years and are finally ready to see Major League Soccer in the five boroughs’ (personal communication, Chance Michaels, 11th January 2015, NY, NY).

Analysis of this in light of the relationship between community and late modernity reveals the integration of three key aspects of late modernity that fuel group creation: loss of the local, desire for identification and permeable group membership. That NYCFC derives its support from existing soccer fans means these are people who have been following European and/or Latin American soccer for some time. As such, they draw their fan identity from a non-local point of orientation at least in so far as they follow from abroad. Many members attend Third Rail meetings wearing merchandise from top European clubs, displaying their allegiance to FC Barcelona or Bayern Munich etc. Fans sitting at the same table wearing shirts of rival clubs in unthinkable in the clubs’ “home-town” and this highlights the de-territorial nature of such fandom as it exists in the USA. This also demonstrates an aspect of unity; being a fan of a European club while living in New York is a point of convergence because soccer fans are already a subculture regardless of which club they follow.

Such cosmopolitanism represents an urban reality that social groups must take heed of if they are to be relevant to this locale. To represent New York City, the supporters’ culture needs to be alert to the city’s cultural diversity including at the level of soccer support. An implicit challenge of groups such as the Third Rail is to negotiate members’ existing loyalties with the creation of a new one: NYCFC. In other words, late modernity has meant a placelessness of loyalty but has also provided an apparent solution: the flowing in of a new opportunity for pace-based identification in the form of a team for New York City.
NYCFC Songs and Late Modernity

This section addresses the singing culture at NYCFC, continuing to demonstrate sensitivity to the key aspects of community (place, longevity, identification and solidarity) in the formation of a supporter’s identity. I discuss a problem for new groups, which is to reach an agreement among diverse people on what the group is like. This is especially difficult when group membership is fragile; if there is sufficient disagreement on this then it is hard for members to recognize the reality of the group, which invites abandonment. But firstly, I discuss the problem language presents for the negotiation of cosmopolitanism and place in creating a New York City singing group.

Spanish Songs

A group that has any serious claim to being representative of New York City cannot use English as the only medium. Hence, desire for reflection of the cities cosmopolitanism means that some songs of the NYCFC supporters must also be in Spanish, especially given the popularity of the game across Latin America. But language can create powerful barriers, particularly in the context of multicultural societies. In March 2015, various supporters’ group leaders got together to produce an early attempt at an NYCFC songbook in response to the many thousands of songs being proposed on social media. A desire to overcome the language obstacle and create a community of supporters is evident in what was published but the details of this demonstrate the struggles of its late modern context. Of the 52 songs in the initial NYCFC supporters’ songbook, 48 were in English and four in Spanish. Within these four songs there were 83 words, 17 of which were *vamos* and 8 were *olé*.12 An

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12 For an example see accompanying materials: Esta Noche
English language only group would fail to capture a New York City identity. Including all of the city’s languages would invite the drowning incoherence that projects of identification and solidarity are seeking to avoid. Even with a salutation to the Spanish language we see that non-Spanish-speaking members will struggle to overcome the barrier as heterogeneity and cosmopolitanism undermine unity. Here, liquid modernity (in its dual avatars of globalization and multiculturalism) further limits community by fostering only partially integrated networks of culture and people. Despite the appeal of an NYCFC songbook that sounds like New York, language barriers remain salient examples of the absence of community in late modern life.

**Oh City Said I**

New York, oh New York

Oh City said I

I'll stand here in the bleachers

Until the day I die

Take me to the Bronx

That's where I want to be

Where I will follow New York,

New York City

One of the most prominent songs in the NYCFC repertoire is ‘Oh City Said I’, adapted from a song by Swansea City FC supporters in the UK. The lyrics reveal three levels of locale as well as claims to lifelong loyalty. The quest for identity is envisaged on explicitly place-based terms, with reference to New York, The Bronx

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13 See accompanying materials: Oh City Said I
and the bleachers in the stadium itself. The centrality of place at such an early stage of the group’s existence is telling with regards to its emerging self-image. Clearly, there is a will to move away from a more unified subculture of supporters in the USA towards one that observes local boundaries. Moreover, inclusion of the phrase ‘until the day I die’ is a stated ambition in the context of group formation. This is a conscious reference to the kind of life-long community that Bauman suggests is unattainable for such groups, yet the lure of its appeal is strong. That such a phrase was used in songs even before the team had played a game attests to the enticing appeal of a long-lasting group.

**We Are NYCFC**

At the January meeting of Third Rail members, two board members were given the floor to present some songs for supporters to sing. Unfortunately, many of the songs were unpopular with the crowd for reasons ranging from poor execution to over-complicated structures and lack of teaching experience. The atmosphere was uneasy and it seemed we had reached an impasse. At that point, one man emerged from the ether with some songs he had composed. He sang loudly, clearly, and jumped up and down on the strongest beats. To the tune of ‘This Old Man’, he began:

NYC! NYC!

We are NYCFC!

From the Bronx all the way

Down to the Battery,

We are NYCFC!14

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14 See accompanying materials: We Are NYCFC
This song energized the crowd and was instantly popular. At later meetings it was re-voiced, was mentioned in a New York Times article (Klein 2015) and sung loudly at the stadium; it was for some time *the* song of Third Rail members and NYCFC. The lyrics reveal obvious importance attached to New York City as a rallying point for the ‘we’. This extends to the club itself through addition of ‘FC’, linking club to city, the kind of place-related identification that is central to community. Gabe Heafitz, the song’s arranger, complained that some in the group were dissatisfied with the song because it uses a children’s melody and is therefore too juvenile. Such resentment could of course be jealousy of the song’s popularity but also speaks of conflicting desire for the group’s self image. One user comments on the Third Rail Facebook page: ‘we are an aggressive city, we will make the opposition feel uncomfortable, and like it or not, we're the villains (...) The ballads and songs need to have the breaks put on. If the TR is to set the tone, than we need to be like 80% chanting, 20% songs about players / ballads.’

This brings us to an important difficulty for the 21st century group. To make values explicit is an especially large problem now because conflict between members’ perceptions of the group as a whole can lead to abandonment. For Bauman, this is a paradox of such groups: there must be binding agents (such as values or components of self-image) providing something to identify with but making them specific undermines the freedom of the members. In other words, there must be some definition to the group but if this is too rigid then its members face limits to their self-creation. Openness about this lack of foundation would collapse the illusion of community altogether (Bauman 2001: 65). This is consistent with Collinson’s observations at Sydney FC, who found that ‘fan identity has a strong normative streak

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15 Gabe Heafitz, email to author, February 2015.
16 Comment on *NYCFC Songs and Chants* Facebook page, accessed March 17th 2015.
(...) there is a limited number of ways that you are allowed to imagine the community and, therefore, yourself’ (2009: 18).

Here we begin to see the confines that late modernity places. The need for community that liquidity highlights cannot be fulfilled without some degree of structure, but structure invites people to dispute and leave, as has been the case for the Third Rail over the course of the season. In July, just four months into the inaugural season, internal disputes erupted in the Third Rail resulting in the resignation of most of the board. This crisis had been brewing because of difficulties in managing diverse expectations in such a large group and was triggered when the president sent an email to members advising them to report fans to the authorities for setting off smoke bombs in the bleachers. Such “snitching” was not widely taken to be a worthy value of NYCFC. One way that fans have responded to this is through defection to of separate supporters’ groups. We can interpret this as exemplifying the fluidity of group membership, but also as an act of resilience to such liquidity. In order to remain loyal to the group of NYCFC supporters, one can switch sub-group allegiance and take greater control over group identity. One such group is Hearts of Oak, which was established as a ‘grassroots supporters group.’ Members sit together in section 238 of Yankee Stadium, the furthest left of the four supporters sections’ columns. They have several songs recorded on a soundcloud page for fans to learn ahead of matches, including one that particularly emphasizes this difference of group values:

Hearts of Oak we are here,

Bounce around and drink your beer (Hearts of Oak Soundcloud).

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At a capo’s meeting in April, Hearts of Oak members were criticized for being uncooperative and ‘wanting to do their own thing’. Gabe even said he did not want to capo in “their section” anymore because of this. Here, the desire to distinguish one’s group membership means a desire to sing different songs. Members are under no illusions of the significance of participating in a common musical experience; if a group needs to be distinguished, its canon needs some autonomy. Following a game against Toronto FC, a reddit user posted the following complaint:

Today, we were pretty far down on the left of 238. A couple times when the TR started chants, the front of 238 would deliberately start something different like their "we are 238" chant. Then (…) we sang along to the Hey Baby chant. Some guy with a man bun stormed up a few rows and got in our face screaming, "We don't chant that. Who chanted that? I hear it again I'll fucking kill you." I thought this HoO/TR childish shit was over (Nycfc Supporter 2015).

While other users insisted that the accused was not a member of Hearts of Oak, this case nicely illustrates the problem of controlling one’s group image. The more family-friendly atmosphere of Third Rail is not to everyone’s taste and here is met with aggressive disdain. Another reddit user, and Hearts of Oak member comments: ‘Hearts of Oak is more than a fan group. We are a brotherhood of men and women alike. We understand that our style of support is not for everyone…” (Hearts_of_Oak Ibid). The implication here is that those who object to this style of support may be more suited to viewing from a different section and, therefore, participating in a different singing culture.

Once I discovered this situation, my curiosity led me to contact Hearts of Oak about membership so I could get a better grip on the nature of the group. My email
received a prompt reply with an attached membership request form, which was somewhat intimidating for a foreign supporter like myself. It began: ‘every incoming member must be sponsored by an active, current member of Hearts of Oak,’ then continued to say that ‘every incoming member will be given a short questionnaire about why they are interested in joining Hearts of Oak’. For which question 2 was: ‘why should we accept you into the Hearts of Oak?’.

**Summary**

Despite its popular use throughout the academic literature on soccer, I have found the word “community” to be a more accurate depiction of ideals than experience of fandom. The high permeability of boundaries, hurdle of language and difficulty of agreeing on group character highlight the inadequacy of “community” in the presence of late modernity, where such integrated coherence may be unattainable. But this is not the end of the story and need not imply the loss of meaning that Bauman predicts. As an ideal, community’s constituent parts are fundamental to the creation of an NYCFC singing culture. The desire for identification, solidarity, face-to-face interaction, place-belonging and longevity of NYCFC fandom propel the group’s song repertoire and the physical manifestation of its performances in the context of supporters’ groups. These coalesce into an overall NYCFC fandom, which can be more appropriately considered one of many social identities in the lives of its members.

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18 Hearts of Oak, email to author, August 2015.
Chapter 3: Song and Social Identity at NYCFC

The fluidity of identity has been a central topic of recent social psychology where the Social Identity Approach (SIA) has become ever more prominent. Research in this area has addressed several key concepts (outlined below) for understanding individuals’ group memberships and I suggest these are particularly relevant for ethnomusicology in late modernity. This perspective holds that people have multiple social identities that are maintained as long as they are useful. We create new ones wherever we sufficiently identify with a category of people and these categories can emerge with little effort. These groups become more meaningful as their unique elements become more significant for group members and are accentuated, producing greater distinction between in and out-group. Where salient, social identities increase the desirability of in-group attitudes. The categorization of thousands of people as NYCFC fans leads to normative behaviors in soccer contexts and singing is at the heart of this. That this identity is new affords members the chance to develop a repertoire of songs and standards of behavior, creating their own defining features. This is a helpful lens of analysis because it focuses on the specific mechanisms of creating social identities such as soccer fan status, producing a coherent narrative that recognizes both the fluidity of globalization and the persisting strength of peoples’ identifications.

This section reviews the literature from the Social Identity Approach, offering a clearer understanding of the processes that give rise to singing cultures at Yankee Stadium. At NYCFC, we see a range of guiding influences predicted by the SIA, including top-down, bottom-up and individual (self-anchoring) levels. In his review of ethnomusicological discussion of ‘identity’, Rice critiques his colleagues for failure
to consult the relevant academic literature on the topic. He suggests the discipline will struggle for significance if we miss out on ‘the potentially fascinating cross-cultural theoretical implications and general tendencies at work whenever music is used to create a sense of individual or social identity’ (Rice 2007: 37). As such I feel it necessary to give attention to experimental design, in the manner of scientific papers’ reviews, to provide a more thorough engagement between the laboratory and real world sources of knowledge.

The Social Identity Approach

The Social Identity Approach comprises two theories: Social Identity Theory, concerned with inter-group relations and the conditions of group membership, and Self-Categorization Theory, which investigates group formation and the content of social identities. Social Identity Theory (SIT) was first developed by Tajfel in the 1970’s and suggested that people value their groups’ distinctiveness in order ‘to preserve, maintain, or achieve a positive social identity’ (Turner and Reynolds 2010: 15). This reasoning emerged on the back of Minimal Group Paradigm (MGP) experiments where participants are randomly assigned group memberships and are then asked to allocate points – which can represent limited resources such as money – among other people assigned to various categories. MGP experiments consistently show that ‘imposing social categories upon people even on an explicitly random basis produces discriminatory intergroup behavior, intragroup cohesion (…) and altruistic orientation towards in-group members’ (Turner 1987: 27-8, emphasis mine). The ease of producing in-group biases led researchers to recognize that people are highly flexible in their group memberships and hence social identities; different situations

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19 I extend his criticism to his own article, which uses the phrase ‘social identity’ 15 times without citing the social identity literature once.
will emphasize different memberships accordingly. This dynamism also unfolds over time. A social identity must be sufficiently valuable, able to contribute positively to the self-concept, in order for that group membership to be desirable and therefore continued. Tajfel and Turner summarize the crux of SIT in the following statement: ‘when social identity is unsatisfactory, individuals will strive either to leave their existing group and join some more positively distinct group and/or to make their existing group more positively distinct’ (1986: 17).

Jones explores SIT in relation to soccer fandom at Luton Town in England. In his fieldwork he found several behaviors that he interpreted as ‘the consequences of group membership’ (2000: 289). He suggests that these ensure participation in fan culture is positively experienced and that ‘such activities [do] not harm the individual’s self image. The result is subsequent perseverance within that activity’ (ibid: 294). In-group favoritism and out-group derogation were the most striking, where being a fan generates an inter-group dynamic with opposition fans enabling to create the positive “us” in contrast to the negative “them”. Jones also highlights ‘unrealistic optimism’ as a mechanism for fans to consider future status enhancement as a reward for their membership, in circumstances where present costs seem to exceed the benefits (ibid: 293). Lastly, he describes how fans maintain overall contentment with the group by choosing to focus on the advantages of membership and disregarding the disadvantages (ibid). In low status groups, this can provide continuing positivity to the social identity by changing the matters on which value is placed. In soccer this often amounts to “we played more beautifully” despite losing the match. Lalonde observed a similar strategy in action among members of a losing hockey team who acknowledged that their competitors held superior skills but rated
their opponents more negatively on other dimensions such as a dirty style of play (1992: 336).

SIT contributes issues of continued membership and the multiplicity of an individual’s social identities to this discussion. Self-Categorization Theory (SCT) seeks to expand on these by probing the dynamism of the self-concept and the conditions of group membership. The theory recognizes that we are born into a socially organized world and that we infer a sense of self from categorization (Stets and Burke 2000: 225). Contrary to Bauman’s cynicism of the fluidity of modern groups, this perspective offers a more positive outlook, whereby we become ‘collaborative architects of the social world we inhabit’ (Haslam, Reicher and Reynolds 2012: 201). This recognizes that identifying with a group can free people from solitude (Turner 1987: 67) and that people ‘work actively to define themselves, to define what they have in common and what they reject’ (Turner and Onorato 1999: 27). In this light, even temporary affiliations are understood as important aspects of the individual’s journey through a complex social life. But the significance of social groups does not end with the maintenance of individual contentment; we experience meaningful changes when we extend the ‘I’ to the ‘we’. SCT research investigates the intricacies and consequences of people’s thirst for group membership, seeking to account for the emergence of trends in-group behavior. Where such behavior is musical, as in the case of NYCFC fans, this is a very useful angle for ethnomusicologists; it affords a process-oriented insight into the construction of an identity that is performed and realized through song. To my knowledge, there is no close study of SCT processes using the case of soccer singing culture. I discuss the key components of SCT’s account of group formation to elucidate these processes and
proceed to its discussion of what the group must offer the individual in order to gain subjective relevance and be useful.

_Polarization, Accentuation and Group Prototype_

Social groups can influence the attitudes and behaviors of their members. In the SIA, the categorization of oneself into a social group results in that group’s distinctive features standing out in circumstances where that identity is relevant. These markers gain significance for the group and become positively valued by its members. As a result, distinctive features become more distinctive and ultimately representative of the group’s character. This is “accentuation” and it in turn creates the group prototype. Here, the group norms developed through accentuated trends within a defined in-group serve as a cognitive guide for (prospective) members on ideal group values and behaviors. Where this is most effective is in polarization: the ‘conformity to an inferred group norm, which accentuates the characteristic position of the group relative to the wider social context’ (Postmes, Haslam and Swaab 2005: 4). So for soccer culture, salient features such as song are seen as what make us “us”, become intensified through greater desirability in this light, and subsequently serve as guidelines for new members on how to behave in relevant circumstances (such as soccer games).

There is a great deal of empirical research supporting this account (Turner et al 1987; Turner, Wetherell, & Hogg, 1989; Spears, Lea and Lee 1990; Hogg and Hardie 1991; for a review see Postmes, Haslam and Swaab 2005). In one study, Postmes, Spears & Lea (2000) analyzed online correspondence of a class of university students from 1993, exploring the emergence of conventions in a new medium. They found that over time, groups had emerged within the cohort and among themselves
converged on use of humor and stylistic form (eg. punctuation use). These characteristics accentuated, resulting in distinct norms of behavior for intragroup communication; moreover, messages that were sent between members of different groups violated these standards (Postmes, Haslam and Swaab 2005: 20). Here, students observed traits of an “us” that became increasingly strong in guiding behavior within the group, but when interaction was needed with classmates outside of their group these were absent. We see behavior accentuated in the creation of norms, giving rise to prototypical standards.

In contexts where a particular group membership is salient, members can be more inclined to identify with the traits of the prototype, where their part in the “we” becomes more relevant than certain individual properties. Onorato and Turner explored gender groups in light of this self-stereotyping phenomenon, by addressing “independence” as a trait associated with a male stereotype. They found that despite the women and men they studied classifying themselves across the spectrum of independence to dependence, when their social identities were made salient, responses tended to fall along stereotypical lines (2004: 273). This is an example of the dynamism of the self-concept that categorization can guide and the strength of normative group expectations on those who perceive them. The generality of this phenomenon invites analogies in various kinds of social arena. Indeed, social identity researchers have not overlooked that this extends easily to soccer supporters’ culture. In a recent article developing the self-stereotyping hypothesis, van Veelen and colleagues find it to be the most obvious example:

This process is called self-stereotyping. To illustrate this process, imagine Ron, a diehard football fan. He dresses in the typical colors of the football team and behaves fanatically at the stadium on behalf of his team. Clearly,
Ron is highly assimilated with the football team’s prototypical features. In fact, who he is in terms of his personality (i.e., introverted, organized, sweet tooth) is irrelevant (van Veelen et al 2015: 2).

It should be clear from this discussion that behaving in congruence with the group prototype is not a matter of hiding one’s true self for acceptance. Instead this is an argument for a multi-faceted self-concept; the contextual transformation of self towards guiding prototypes is a feature of our social reality. In other words, the security and knowledge of the world that one feels as a fan at Yankee Stadium on a Saturday is not undermined by differing self-conception as a dentist at work on Monday. Likewise, within the USA’s multisport society, fans often have many sports-team social identities that do not conflict.

Bottom Up Process of Prototype Formation

So we see that “selves” can be flexible to suit perceived group ideals. But this is not the only process in in-group identification because a group prototype is not always a matter of top-down deduction for members. For groups in which there are less established conventions, a process of induction can play a vital role in the creation and development of norms (Swaab, Postmes, & Spears, 2008; Jans, Postmes, and Van der Zee 2011). In such cases, people recognize consistencies of attitudes and behaviors of fellow members, which then become influential in guiding behavior (Postmes, Haslam and Swaab 2005: 21). So while global fandom provides guidance for fans at NYCFC, so too does on-the-ground observation of trends at Yankee Stadium.

This effect is believed to be especially prominent in groups where members have a high level of interpersonal interaction. Postmes and colleagues (2005) looked at the
relationship between individuation/anonymity and induction of norms in groups based on either an established social identity or interpersonal bond. Participants were randomly divided into two conditions, ostensibly based on either matching personality traits or a shared political outlook. These were divided into groups of 3 people, who debated two political topics in an online discussion. Within each condition, half of the groups communicated anonymously, and half with a first name and profile picture. After which, participants answered several questions about the political topics and the discussion groups. They found that polarization occurred in opposite ways between shared identity vs. personal bond groups. In groups that believed they were united by a common political category (established social identity), the anonymous interactions were significantly more likely to produce extremitized views, whereas the shared personal interest groups were more likely to polarize when their individual identity was apparent. Moreover, this polarization occurred in both conditions despite there being no instruction in the experiment to reach agreement (Postmes et al 2005: 753). This is consistent with the view that groups made up of interpersonal relationships develop normative behaviors when interactions are traceable to influential individuals (Postmes, Haslam and Swaab 2005: 6). Further evidence for bottom-up consequences of social categorization was found in the content of the messages, where interpersonal groups polarized more gradually compared with shared identity groups, which agreed a (stereotyped) polarized position early in the process (Postmes et al 2005: 759).

The inductive aspect of social identity is central to interactions of people leading to conventions in the absence of clear top-down group norms. Such circumstances abound in late modernity, with the rapid rise and fall of new categorizations. NYCFC fans are placed at multiple ends of the social identity vs. interpersonal group continuum; it is both a fresh assortment of individuals with common interests, many
of whom can be witnessed close up, and at the same time a social identity group of thousands of anonymous individuals. In its initial stages, the development of a singing culture must include bottom up processes to standardize a repertoire of songs. Importantly however, there is no suggestion that inductive and deductive processes are mutually exclusive and there is no sudden point at which it becomes an established social identity where new members can infer norms from the anonymous totality. Top down and bottom up processes of prototype deduction and induction must combine and overlap in the creation of an NYCFC fan-identity.

Self-Anchoring in Identification

Well-established groups are likely to have a clearer identity from which to draw behavioral influence and in newer ones members can develop norms from observed patterns. Recent research has also pursued the opposite situation, whereby we use impressions of ourselves to generate an understanding of what the groups we are in are like. In other words, perceived prototypes are not limited to deduction from established group ideals, or created through interaction, but can also occur from the projection of the self, or “self-anchoring”, whereby we imagine our fellow group members to be like us (van Veelen et al 2015: 1). This should be no great surprise, given that ‘if self-stereotyping were the only cognitive route towards identification, this would imply that people solely identify with clearly defined groups’ (van Veelen, Otten and Hansen 2013: 544). Where group identity is poorly defined, such as in new groups, an understanding of what the group is like is not prescribed and if members are to perceive it as an entity there must be other paths.

Van Veelen, Otten and Hansen conducted a series of experiments addressing category clarity and self-anchoring. In one example (2013: study 2), 113 Dutch
participants were asked to rate themselves on several character traits, and were then divided into two conditions: ‘clear national identity’ and ‘unclear’. Those in the first condition read a report from a leading research institute that argued the Dutch have a clear national identity and can readily describe its features. Those in the ‘unclear’ condition read a report from the same institute arguing the opposite to be true. Following this, participants were asked to rate the same vague character traits as in the pretest, this time on their relevance for the Dutch identity. Results strongly support the hypothesis that self-anchoring generates perceived content in groups with unclear identities (van Veelen, Otten and Hansen 2013: 555).

This is not to suggest that these processes are mutually exclusive either. In real life scenarios, we do not know everything about the social groups we are in and the assumption that the group is like the self on these dimensions can be useful. Likewise, the group can have more a clearly defined character on certain dimensions. These processes can therefore combine to ‘dissolve cognitive ambiguities in the relation between the person and the ingroup’ (van Veelen et al 2015: 6). I suggest that this is particularly prominent in late modernity, where our increased access to levels of identification provides ample room for uncertainty about details regarding the content of these identities. Indeed, other research has supported the idea that information about the self is used, more than valence, to ‘give meaning to a novel category’ (Otten & Wentura 2001: 31). Moreover, it is likely that self-anchoring can be especially useful in the early stages of categorization, and once a better idea of the in-group prototype emerges, that can become more influential (Van Veblen, Hansen and Otten 2014). Hence, a new category such as NYCFC fans has information on what fans are like in general, but much uncertainty remains as to what NYCFC fan culture

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20 Pilot data indicated that these were not considered relevant to Dutch stereotypes
specifically is like. At the beginning of the process in particular, this approach expects that fans will use information about their individual attitudes to fandom to generate expectations of group values in order to have a mental image of the group to identify with.

**Criteria for Categorization**

Proponents of SCT suggest that group formation begins to occur wherever one experiences ‘the perception of self and others as a cognitive unit in contrast to yet others within the psychological frame of reference’ (Turner 1987: 64). This is termed “comparative fit” and stipulates that ‘people will tend to be categorized into two distinct groups where in-group differences are perceived as smaller than out-group differences’\(^{21}\) (Turner et al 1994: 455). For someone to have the possibility of identifying with a category they must believe that others have some dimension of homogeneity\(^{22}\) that distinguishes them from yet others. Categorization as an NYCFC fan requires the creation of the team as distinct from other teams, so that fans can recognize each other on the dimension of comparative fit in contrast to fans of other teams and non-fans.

Of course, these observations do not occur in a social vacuum; people have prior knowledge and expectations about social interactions within and between groups. So this combines with “normative fit”, where these similarities and differences are ‘consistent with our understanding of the substantive social meaning of the social category’ (Turner et al 1994: 455). This means that an apparent pattern can lead to group formation if it “fits” the social category. For example, in Oakes, Turner and Hassam’s classic study, participants were presented with 3 arts students and 3 science

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\(^{21}\) It is useful to mention that “categorization” does not necessarily entail named groups.

\(^{22}\) An example of this could be heterogeneity: groups that value diversity
students and their attitudes to prioritizing hard work or social life (1991). They found that these categories become more cohesive – groups are perceived as more of a unit and as more likely to influence each other – where the science students unanimously value hard work and the arts students value social life. This supports the argument that a category becomes meaningful, with an increased potential for influence, where it is in line with our broader understanding of the world. For NYCFC, normative fit concerns the content of the social identity, namely watching matches and participation in singing. Fans can accept each other and take meaning in categorization where our experiences of each other are in line with our general expectations about fandom.

The third piece of the categorization puzzle also concerns prior experience but this time to do with oneself. “Perceiver readiness” assesses the relevance of potential categories based on prior experience, expectations and specific goals or needs: ‘it reflects the active selectivity of the perceiver in being ready to use categories that are central, relevant, useful, or likely to be confirmed by reality’ (Turner et al 1994: 455). This is the idea that we would be more ready to identify with some categories rather than others that may be equally available: e.g. to categorize oneself as “a Democrat” rather than “tall” at a political rally. Categories vary in their applicability and potential new ones must interact with the person’s idea of themself and their goals in order to be absorbed at a given moment. As far as NYCFC is concerned, the announcement of the club’s creation generated excitement among fans of the sport who had long awaited a professional team in New York City. Thousands were ready to categorize themselves as fans based on their passion for soccer and the city.
NYCFC

Next, I explore the Social Identity Approach in the light of my fieldwork findings from the inaugural season of New York City Football Club. As a category that is both new and based on social identity, it is well placed to inspire further angles of SIA research in addition to explanatory potential in the opposite direction.

Fit

The announcement in 2013 that there would be a new MLS team in New York City saw a quick reaction from many members of the public who were eager to become fans. The existence of the team creates the opportunity for people to categorize themselves as NYCFC supporters. Yet these categories are not void of content. This becomes important in the study of musical behaviors because singing is so prominent in expectations of behavior in global soccer; experience of being in this group is an experience of being musical. The centrality of this is clear to any attendee of the matches, but also evidenced by the emergence of a repertoire before the team had begun to compete at all. As we have seen, self-categorization theory suggests that we are more ready to infer normative influence where group behavior is consistent with our understandings of a category. Hence, singing at NYCFC is immediately available as a tool for group realization, and by extension, for analysis within the SIA.

Prototypical Fandom and NYCFC

The prominence of singing at soccer matches makes it intimately tied with global expectations about fan behavior. This general prototypical image is available for all individual spectators at a new team, with our personal variances in specific details, and constitutes a vital source of information in the construction of a fan culture. The
most prominent example of this is in NYCFC fans’ use of many of the global and USA “standards” in the repertoire, which constitute the majority of melodies performed at matches. But another important example of this process is the way many fans seek to understand behaviors in relation to how things operate in more established soccer cultures. For example, a Reddit user complained at the use of the song ‘New York is Blue and White’ in matches against teams other than the New York Red Bulls\(^{23}\) (SheltonZohin 2015). The uncertainty concerns whether or not to contrast against fans that are not present. The immediate reply from another user offered reassurance: ‘most teams will still sing about their rivals even though they're not playing them. See: Chelsea FC, Arsenal, Tottenham, Millwall, Manchester City/United’ (thewelldressedpt 2015).

Likewise, at the final game of the season against the New England Revolution, a group of fans to my left were singing abusive songs about the New York Red Bulls. A fan to my right became aggravated and shouted aggressively towards those fans, saying we should focus on who we are playing right now, and that no one in Europe berates absent teams. Despite the factual error of this, he was exhibiting the same kind of relationship to prototypical fandom as the previous example. Namely deduction, where a fan is expected to behave in certain ways and violation of that is tantamount to “doing it wrong”. This is a controversial position among those fans who are not so thrilled to sign up wholeheartedly to a prescribed identity. One reddit user comments:

There's a level of snobbery specific to soccer in this country that is truly amazing (…) There's people who truly believe there's a "right and wrong" way to cheer for teams. I'll never understand it… You have the freedom to choose what you want (…) I don't have to live up to anyone's

\(^{23}\) Who wear red
expectations but my own. And it's ridiculous that I would have to meet
some code or policy, like a fraternity, in order to be "accepted"
(swampy13 2015).

This is a position I have encountered many times in my research at NYCFC. At a Capos’ meeting in June, Blue Ladies President Emma gave an impassioned speech on how we can take influence from European and Latin American cultures but stressed there is no need to imitate. This was elaborated by another attendee who expressed resentment towards fans who want to sing Manchester City songs, based on the joint ownership of the two clubs. Clearly the established global prototype is influential in guiding behavior but is not the only pull. Appropriate for liquid modernity’s emphasis on self-creation, there is a great deal of interaction between top-down and bottom up processes.

Bottom Up

Consistent with more recent developments in social psychology, we see an interactive process of identity formation. The prototypical fan is not simply inferred from experience of established fandom, but actively developed and created for NYCFC. For many people this is an exciting prospect, and is part of the attraction of the club. Brooklyn based fan Dave Bogart was quoted in the New York Post as saying: ‘the fun part is building a culture here. There’s no NY fan base, so we are starting it from scratch. It’s really grass roots’ (in Fleming 2015). For the inductive formation of social identity, those fans whose behavior is interpreted as being most fan-like become influential in establishing norms. The many thousands of proposed songs posted on various internet forums confirm that there is no lack of appetite for this level of influence. The system of capos was designed to encourage and support
unity of songs across the poor acoustics of Yankee stadium, thereby encouraging at least these norms to emerge. At a capo’s meeting in April, there was much discussion about how to deal with the problem of those who do not sing. A Templados member said: ‘it’s down to us to be the group we want to be, with everyone singing and bouncing for 90 minutes.’\textsuperscript{24} Those at the meeting were aware that there is no guarantee of success in creating an active singing culture and sought ways to promote this outcome.

\textit{Influential characters}

But how are these norms generated? How does a song enter the canon of a team’s chants? This was one of my central research questions and most of the answers I have received have addressed the features of a prospective song (i.e. simplicity, catchiness etc.). In terms of process, the capo system at NYCFC has promoted songs that have reached a threshold of popularity, in efforts to coordinate and produce more unified participation. But that some songs reach this threshold and others do not contains some level of mystery, given the overwhelmingly large numbers of suggestions.

When I asked Kaetlin, a Blue Ladies member and regular at matches and fan meetings, she said bluntly: ‘it has to come from the mouth of a very loud person… like Andy’ (Personal Communication, Kaetlin, October 2015, NY, NY). Influential individuals are vital for the canonization process, as their actions appeal to large numbers to join in, a process that creates conventions particularly for groups seeking them.

But loudness is certainly not the whole story of shaping a fan culture. Indeed, while I agree that the Andy who Kaetlin mentioned was particularly influential in this process it is interesting to note the circumstances where I first came across him. It was

\textsuperscript{24} Notes from Capo’s meeting NY,NY, April 22 2015.
the January meeting of Third Rail members and he was struggling to inspire the crowd who were eager to learn the songs that the Third Rail was proposing. It was then that Gabe appeared, proposing the first major hit of NYCFC supporters mentioned above. When I asked Gabe by email how to make a song become popular, he offered a nine-point plan in reply:

2. Energy
3. Good Execution
4. Good Volume
5. A Good Idea
6. The Right Timing – ‘you have to seize on a crowd’s energy’
7. Persistence – ‘this can even overcome a lack of #5, perhaps unfortunately’
8. An Intact Reputation
9. A Bit of Novelty – Not to overdo it a song.\textsuperscript{25}

Songs that have met these criteria have certainly been more likely to enter the canon. This list is not exhaustive, but indicative of the ways in which induction of prototypes operates in this context.

Yet the bottom-up process has also faced difficulties and criticism. In particular, many pixels have been spilled in the discussion of letting a culture develop \textit{organically} in contrast to the active promotion of certain songs and particular ways of behaving. Here, resentment is expressed towards those who try to create group norms, with a preference for a more anonymous source of fan identity. An article in USA

\textsuperscript{25} Gabe Heafitz, email to author, February 2015.
Today discusses this with praise for the song ‘NYC isn’t nothing to fuck with’,26 an adaptation of the famous Wu Tang Clan song:

one chant the guys all agree on is one that came up organically (…) The other chants may feel more like soccer chants, but this expletive-ridden ode to Wu-Tang felt the most real, and seemed to best capture the attitude of the standing masses in the cheap seats (Scott 2015)

As it transpires, this song is well used in USA soccer circles, including for New York Red Bulls and the national team, so its organicity difficult to disentangle. What is clear is that there is hostility towards organizing the singing culture, where suspicion arises from the active creation of norms.

In some cases this is interpreted as the same top-down process as the deduction of a global identity: ‘there is too much focus on how to develop the fan culture by looking at how it’s done elsewhere instead of letting it happen naturally’ (Morganti 2015). The implication of this line of thinking is that even what I have termed ‘bottom-up’ (because it seeks to spread grassroots initiatives across the entire supporters’ section) is insufficient to be counted as grassroots. Although, it is important to note that I have only encountered the purist/organic position on the internet or second-hand, via fans complaining about the “snobs”. This leads me to believe that the position is not widely held among those who attend regular meetings and watch-parties, and participate in the more inter-personal aspects of the supporters’ culture. Therefore, a separation appears in the complex structure of a new social-identity group between the more individuated and the more anonymous. In this light, the more individuated system of named individuals encouraging and promoting songs is consistent with expectations for the interpersonal end of the group-spectrum,

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26 See accompanying materials: NYC Aint Nothing to Fuck With
whereas this is less attractive for more distant members of the anonymous crowd. What is clear, however, is that there is huge value placed on the emergence of NYCFC fan culture from the stands. Moreover, the repertoire of songs has been generated for this team specifically by its fans. That this interacts with global trends in football support attests to the multi-directional construction of behavioral norms. This leads us to a final piece of supporters’ construction of the content of their social identity.

*Self-Anchorong*

A standout feature of the first season has been the internal squabbling among fans and between fan groups. There are many conflicting accounts of what NYCFC support should be like and these have flourished into disputes. I suggest this is largely explained by the fact that individuals have categorized themselves as fans, a strong social identity commitment that preceded encounter with conflicting accounts of a group identity. In other words, fans extended their own ideal soccer identities to NYCFC fandom but have been dissatisfied with the character of the emerging group.

Conflicts over what kind of group to be are epiphenomenal of the clash that occurs when fans encounter very different attitudes to what were expected. This has frequently occurred over the use of children’s songs melodies for songs for the team. For example, towards the end of the season a song emerged for the goalkeeper Josh Saunders to the melody of frère Jacques. The first comment on its original suggestion on the Facebook page for songs and chants reads: ‘it pains me to see another nursery rhyme being used for a chant (…) Saunders deserves better than this.’

27 Comment on *NYCFC Songs and Chants* Facebook page, accessed July 25th 2015
the same page, Emma responds to those who only participate in songs that fit their fan-ideals:

Do I love all [songs]? No. But I'll do them. We need time to develop our identity. We can't expect to be the best chanting/singing supporters in season 1 (ibid).

Such advice is not universally applicable though. Many supporters (including myself) have been surprised that their image of a 21st century group representing New York City has been so at odds with the reality encountered at Yankee Stadium on the issue of homophobic abuse. When the opposition goalkeeper takes a goal kick, an enormous number of fans in the supporters’ section shout ‘Puto!’ , a term denoting a male sex-worker with unambiguous homophobic connotations. A reddit user comments on this topic: ‘as a gay guy, I absolutely hate this. But my friend just waves his rainbow flag every time we hear it by our section’ (nycsurfer 2015). Participation for many of us is out of the question as it violates our standards of behavior. Here, we have experienced the alienating realization that the “we” is not so close to the “I” on this particular measure.

Self-anchoring participates in the blend of sources constructing each member’s account of prototypical and normative fan behaviors. This is evidenced in the frustrations and conflict among supporters who have witnessed their understanding of the group contradicted by developing norms. As expected, self-anchoring becomes less practicable over time, as group characteristics are more easily observable in real world experience. This gives rise to the kinds of conflict predicted by Bauman, where making collective identities too specific undermines the ability of the individual to create themselves (2001: 64). Future empirical research on self-anchoring should
explore this avenue of inquiry, employing longitudinal studies to address the issue of conflict in-group formation processes.

**Summary**

This chapter has reviewed Social Identity Approach and its relevance for group formation at NYCFC. It argues that people wish for groups that they are members of to be positively valued and will adapt the character of, and where necessary, membership of these groups. The approach further argues that the content of group identities largely follows categorization, wherein perceived prototypes are constructed from knowledge of the group, behaviors of individuals, and for new groups, personal projection. In 21st Century New York City, people have ever more opportunities to adopt meaningful new social categorizations. A new category such as fandom in the supporters’ section at NYCFC sees the tussle of these sources in the construction of standardized repertoires of songs as behavioral norms. They become available for any fan to learn them and categorization as a fan increases their desirability. But participating in these particular activities does not only signal group membership, it also perpetuates social cohesion, creating the bonds that realize the group. It is here I turn towards Durkheimian ritual to better understand what follows categorization in the process of NYCFC supporters’ group formation.
Chapter 4: Soccer Song, Ritual and Group Formation

In the midst of an assembly animated by a common passion, we become susceptible of acts and sentiments of which we are incapable when reduced to our own forces; and when the assembly is dissolved and when, finding ourselves alone again, we fall back to our ordinary level, we are then able to measure the height to which we have been raised above ourselves (Durkheim 1912/1965: 240).

As we have seen, thousands of people have categorized themselves as NYCFC fans and developed a range of normative behaviors for when this social identity is salient. Central to these are song and bodily coordination, which brings us to consider the effects of these embodied norms. This chapter investigates singing culture at NYCFC as ritual, arguing that performances are themselves mechanisms of group creation. First, I briefly examine the term “ritual” to offer conceptual clarity to the discussion. I then turn to the Durkheimian tradition, which posits a model of how euphoric ritual functions to create social identification and cohesion. I consider this with reference to both performance and fan discourse at NYCFC, showing that repetition, synchrony, shared focus of attention and the presence of group symbols produce solidarity and standards of morality for this new supporters’ culture.

The Term

The term ‘ritual’ is controversial in modern anthropology. Asad begins his genealogy of the concept with the claim: ‘every ethnographer will probably recognize a ritual when he or she sees one, because ritual is, of course, symbolic activity as opposed to the instrumental behavior of everyday life’ (Asad 1988: 73). Mahmood
extends this critical reflection to suggest that even where anthropologists have debated whether ritual is a ‘type of human behavior’ or a feature of a wide variety of human actions, they have agreed that it is set apart from ‘mundane activities’ (Mahmood 2001: 827; for a review see Bell 1992). But in her ethnography of women’s prayers in Cairo, Mahmood observes that participants used ritual as part of a package of daily self-cultivation and connection to God. The fact that ritual can comprise fundamental everyday modes of action, and do so consciously, leads her to suggest that the distinction between ritual and ‘pragmatic action’ cannot be clear cut (2001: 832-3).

The broad distinction that these writers claim has dominated the ethnographic literature is a dichotomy between the symbolic (ritual) and the everyday or mundane realms. This falls apart when we consider the everydayness of much symbolic activity, such as religious prayer, and the symbolic side of the everyday, such as leaving the toilet seat down. At this point it is possible to head down a deconstructionist path and question the usefulness of a category with unclear boundaries. But a potentially more fruitful path is also available, in which we recognize ritual as a demystified analytical tool. Bridging the realms of the symbolic and the mundane lends itself to interpretations of secular and urban ritual, where we can more closely explore the interactions of these supposedly oppositional categories of symbolic and everyday. Dropping the commitment to this distinction does not destroy the ethnographic fantasy of studying transformative, spectacular rituals. It simply recognizes a range of ritual scales and intensities, in which some are more transformative than others.

While detailed ontological boundaries may be unavailable, we can fraction the concept of ritual into its recurring parts, in the hope that these may provide sites of detailed analysis. In this way we can consider a list of features that rituals often
display, but are not necessarily essential (like Wittgenstein’s games mentioned above). Regarding group rituals (for our purposes), Whitehouse and Lanman attempt to list key features informed by recent research in cognitive anthropology. The most prominent in their discussion are: ‘causally opaque conventions, synchrony, dysphoric and euphoric arousal’ (2014: 678). The idea of ritual as convention captures the most salient feature, in which doing something in a particular way enables its replication more easily than situationally unique behavior. Synchrony and arousal feature prominently in ethnographic descriptions of ritual, are central to group interaction and ever-present in the world of soccer song.

Causal opacity offers a more nuanced criterion than “symbolism” in discussion of ritual acts, one that is empirically verifiable in so far as it is grounded in the ritual participants’ views. This is where the relationship between actions and objectives cannot be expressed in physical-causal terms. For example, a funeral may serve to give respect to the dead but how exactly this respect is delivered may not be relevant to participants. As Asad notes, the category “symbolic” leaves too much scope for the ethnographer to assess what should be included (1988: 78) and participants may not share the ethnographers assertion that these are any less instrumental (Santino 2011: 63). With causal opacity in its place, we can link convention to symbolic action in a falsifiable way in so far as the ritual participants determine the nature of causation. In soccer chants, we could easily imagine a causal relationship between song (cheering on the team) and its objective (victory). Though this has almost never been expressed in my fieldwork and singing also occurs before and after games, as well as when watching together on TV, rendering the “cheering on the team” perspective somewhat limited. This is one important factor in my interpretation of the goal of singing at

[28] https://youtu.be/cCDKiGjvVEk
NYCFC being both successful performance of song itself and the interpersonal consequences of this for participants, rather than as a means for some external end.

The advantage of the conception outlined here is that it draws observable common threads in ritual that do not assume a qualitatively huge distinction between ritual and everyday behavior. So when we make functional claims about ritual acts and events, such as the Durkheimian claim that this chapter proposes in the following sections, we can work with specific mechanisms such as synchrony, arousal and causal opacity in mind. In what follows, I show that these features are important for NYCFC fandom, justifying the label “ritual”. I then apply the Durkhemian model, arguing that performance creates the bonds that this social identity needs to become meaningful.

Ritual and NYCFC

At the January 2015 meeting of Third Rail members mentioned above, two members of the board were given the floor to discuss match-day entertainment. Their remit covered a range of matters from drinking before the game, to coordinating colors and crucially: songs. The first point on their agenda was to introduce songs they had composed for the group, at which point Chance, then President, interrupted to say he wanted the songs to come at the end of the meeting. This demonstrates an awareness of the effect of song in this kind of group formation; there is a clear idea of what is to be achieved by singing, a feeling of togetherness, and it is best that everyone leaves the meeting with this feeling. This feeling is central to my analysis of singing as a tool for realizing the group.

In the stadium, the most salient features of soccer support are large amounts of repetition in song and synchrony in body movement, while everyone is focused on the
same treasured and symbol-laden images. These four elements: repetition, synchrony, shared focus of attention, symbols of the group, are the four principal ingredients of Durkheimgian ritual. Over the course of his ‘The Elementary Forms of Religious Life’, Durkheim (1912/1965) discusses several rituals among Australian aboriginal peoples. His observations coalesce into a theory of “collective effervescence”, where bodies synchronized in intense ritual, mutually aware and with a common focus of attention are transformed into a feeling of being above and beyond themselves. He notes that for participants, the feeling generated is supposed to strengthen the connection to God, yet continues, ‘they at the same time really strengthen the bonds attaching the individual to the society’ (ibid: 258). This is the origin of the Durkheimian position that: ‘instead of merely expressing social solidarity, physically intense rituals create it’ (Heider and Warner 2010: 76). Hence, this makes the kind of performance Durkheim refers to a very effective tool for new groups, where existing solidarity is low and can be enhanced through potentially euphoric ritual. Of course, the bonds that emerge from collective effervescence would weaken without periodical reinforcement, which for Durkheim explains the repeated coming together of human bodies to reinforce this group feeling (1912/1965: 240-1).

Collins provides a more up to date expression of how Durkheimian ritual operates. He highlights collective movement and shared focus of attention as key components, suggesting physical coordination generates intersubjectivity, our sensitivity to each other’s states of mind, while ‘collective attention enhances the expression of shared emotion’ (Collins 2004: 35). Here, rhythmic displays in rituals afford individuals insights into other peoples’ experience of being in the world, which is intensified as each participant becomes more aware of each other’s bodies and more aware of this awareness. Figure 1 is Collins’ model of this phenomenon.
Synchrony contributes to ecstasy by perpetuating awareness of a shared experience, as being present with others in a similar state reinforces our mood. Being part of a larger whole, with emotions personified in a visible symbol, ensures the emergence of collective effervescence. This ‘is a momentary state, but it carries over into more prolonged effects when it becomes embodied in sentiments of group solidarity, symbols or sacred objects, and individual emotional energy,’ which the Durkheimian tradition considers to be the function of such occasions (ibid: 36). So moments of high intensity are potent agents in the ritual program of fostering solidarity. The requirement of physical presence means that the generation of group solidarity is restricted to in-group members (at least those who show up), whether members of the same religious congregation, soccer club, school, political party and so on.

Euphoria at Yankee Stadium: Andrea Pirlo

The highest moment of euphoria in the first season of NYCFC was the 56th minute introduction of Andrea Pirlo in the game against Orlando City at Yankee Stadium on July 26th. The rumormills had been buzzing over preceding weeks that the World Cup winner was on his way to New York for a final chapter in his illustrious career. Once confirmed, anticipation was exploding for the moment in which he

(Figure 1: Collins’s model of euphoric ritual, Collins 2004: 48)
would set his famous feet onto the field in the Bronx. As he removed his tracksuit the
supporters’ section became aware that a hero was about to enter and become a
representative of NYCFC. I began to film and Clip 1 of the accompanying materials is
my recording of this moment. For many, legends of soccer had only ever been seen on
a TV screen and now the club that had been promised to New Yorkers was offering
unprecedented access to the highest level of sporting icon. Thousands began to chant
his name as there was no agreed melody for “his song” at this stage. Numerous
cameras emerged to capture this moment from spectators’ points of view. The
chanting became louder and the drums were loud and clear, enabling greater
synchrony despite the poor acoustics of the open-air section. Screams were audible
from the moment he walked towards the field. Suddenly, all of this implodes, the
game is in progress and NYCFC are in a promising position. A brief moment of anger
emerges as David Villa is flagged offside but this means that play has stopped, the
substitution can take place and Andrea Pirlo can enter. This instant provides the
mutual focus of attention, the bodies energized together, the symbol of the group and
the shared mood of Durkheimian ritual at its peak. The screams returned (including
mine now), people were bouncing and clapping, some were bowing and everyone was
aware of the excitement of those around them contributing to an even greater sense of
euphoria.

Of course, this effervescence was not the standard level of arousal for most
games of the season. It was a peak in which we experienced the sensation of being
part of something remarkable. This was true even for myself, not an NYCFC fan and
not a New Yorker, but so captivated by being present in the moment that I had no
sense of being an outsider. It is clear how these overwhelming moments can foster a
sense of belonging, as they generate an intense awareness of shared joy among people.
But in most games, especially games in which NYCFC loses, the atmosphere is often more somber. Hence, while this is a target and when the conditions are right it can be reached, euphoria is not the only ritual dimension to be interpreted here. Even in less extreme moments, shared participation fosters group sentiment and it is here that I turn next.

**Ritual In the Soccer Literature**

The literature on soccer song makes regular allusions to its ritual qualities. This is typically presented in functionalist terms, whereby the group is realized through mass participation, even without effervescence. A prime example of this is Collinson, who in his study at Sydney FC claims: ‘football songs, understood as an act of musicking, produce identity through their ritualized performance in public spaces.’ This is possible because ‘singing a football song marks one’s membership of a community, it produces that idealized community and it also celebrates that community’ (2009: 17). Jack echoes this as he discusses ritual song by Shamrock Rovers fans in Dublin suggesting it defines a collective identity that lasts long after the game has ended (2012: 44). Cobussen argues that ritualized performance of city names helps to generate a sense of belonging for supporters in the Netherlands, particularly as suburbanization creates greater distance from supporters and “their” cities (2012: 98-9). This pattern continues deeply into the literature on this topic (Brown, Crabbe and Mellor 2006: 170; Clark 2006: 500; Back 2003: 324). As Finnegan reminds us, there is a popular understanding that music has the special ability to unite us ‘in some unique and profound way’ (2007: 346). Further, many of the soccer writers touch on some or all of the four prominent roles of music in ritual that ethnomusicologists Harris and Norton draw attention to:
This should make clear the relevance of soccer song for the study of music in ritual particularly in 21st Century urban ethnography, in which our identities constantly demand articulation. In addition, this perspective also offers the interpretation of the soccer event as a whole being the ritual, for which the supporters are the musical specialists.

General literature on soccer fandom also situates it within the realm of ritualistic group creation. Blackshaw stresses that soccer fans are groups that are not ‘primarily determined by objective and prior social facts such a class location’, but that they become a meaningful unit as a result of ‘frequent interaction of quite socially diverse individuals’ (2008: 331). As discussed above, these interactions are at the core of Durkheimian ritual, where bodily co-presence contributes to group creation. Collins states: ‘this is essentially what the lure of the game-spectacle is all about: the pleasure of those moments of having one's own emotions raised by a noisy crowd expressing the same thing’ (2004: 55).

Synchrony and Repetition: Rush Hour Rally

On the 6th of June, approximately 400 NYCFC fans travelled to Chester, PA for the away game against Philadelphia Union. At half time, fans were spreading round the message that we had something planned for the 60th minute. I was unable to hear exactly what the message was, but when the time approached, dozens of people in
front of me began frantically organizing the away-supporters’ section to look to the right. After some hesitance (and a confusing snare drum pattern) we began a highly energized rendition of a song newly entering the NYCFC repertoire. This was the first incarnation of what is now a signature of NYCFC fandom: the Rush Hour Rally. As a forums user explained the following day: ‘in the 60th minute of the game we turn to our right side one hand over each shoulder of your fellow supporter and JUMP. We did this yesterday for the first time and it was magic’ (Tubz NYHC 2015). A video emerged on YouTube that day and I provide the link here.\(^\text{29}\) Thereafter, at the 60th minute of each game the supporters’ section turns to the right, puts an arm on their neighbor and jumps to the song:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Everywhere we go,} \\
\text{Everywhere we go,} \\
\text{We’re the New York boys;}^{30} \\
\text{Making all the noise,} \\
\text{Everywhere we go…}
\end{align*}
\]

This is repeated for the duration of the minute where 60 displays on the scoreboard’s clock, structuring ritual time for participants. The organizer of this initiative appeared on an NYCFC fans podcast, discussing the rationale:

I tried to start something where we’re all one, the supporters’ sections (…) before the [Philadelphia] game I was announcing in the 60th minute we’re gonna jump around and sing this song (…) and people wanted to do it

\(^{29}\) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AY4JQO6XiXBo&feature=youtu.be

\(^{30}\) There was brief discussion of having women sing ‘girls’ here, though I never saw this materialize (it doesn’t rhyme with noise).
and everyone who joined in was like hey man we have to do this at our house (Soto 2015).

This dream was realized the following week at the home game against Montreal Impact. The mission to pump positive energy into thousands of people through song and synchronized movement was popular, successful and both sonically and visually impressive. From where I was bouncing each week, it seemed everyone was participating and feeling a part of something big. It was only a month after the season had ended that I noticed a video on YouTube which showed a more complicated picture. Here, in the Rush Hour Rally against the Red Bulls on June 28th, we can see that the majority of fans are indeed participating, but the pillar to the viewer’s right, section 238, is resolutely unimpressed. This is the home of the group Hearts of Oak that we have seen above wishing to participate in their own fan culture. To join in a large-scale co-ordination exercise would be to share a group defining moment with the rest of the supporters’ section. On this evidence, it would appear that that is not on the agenda of these fans, who recognize the bonding power of energetic fan displays.

31 http://instagify.com/media/1007631917335456581_9882057
32 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=55TW4--K1uY
Synchrony: Experimental Evidence

The preceding section discusses sociological and ethnographic accounts of ritual in the manifestation of cohesive social units. But how far are these simply post-hoc descriptions and how consistent is it with what we know from other forms of enquiry? I now offer a very brief review of some empirical studies that provide experimental support for the mechanisms of group cohesion discussed in this thesis. This sheds light on why shared bodily movement in song is such an appropriate way to transform a diverse assortment of individuals into a group that identifies as even outside of the stadium. In particular, it is useful because it develops an account of ritual efficacy that

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does not depend on euphoria, whereby even the lower levels of arousal help to generate group sentiment.

There is now a large body of experimental data that suggests bodily synchrony has positive effects on social measures such as trust and cooperation. Wiltermuth and Heath (2009) carried out a series of experiments addressing the impact of synchrony on trust. They found that participants who walked together in synchrony showed greater cooperation on a group economics exercise than those in who walked together out-of-step (2009: 2). In a second experiment that involved the participants wearing headphones, they found that subjects who sang and swayed together in synchrony showed greater economic cooperation than those who did so asynchronously (ibid: 3). Hove and Risen (2009) found that synchronous finger tapping between individuals makes them like each other more. They report that subjects who were better entrained with the experimenter’s tapping reported her as more likeable than those less synchronized, and those tapping on the off-beat (Hove and Risen 2009: 953-5). Valdesolo and DeSteno used a similar tapping exercise to assess the effect of synchrony on compassion. They found that participants who tapped in synchrony, were more likely to help out when their partner was assigned an unfair workload than those who tapped asynchronously (Valdesolo and DeSteno 2011: 264). Likewise, Kokal and colleagues found that participants who had tapped together with the experimenter, picked up a significantly higher number of pencils dropped “accidentally” by her than those who tapped on the off beat (Kokal et al. 2011: 6).

Anshel and Kipper (1988) subjected participants to an hour of either singing, music listening, poetry performance or film viewing. They found that participants in both musical conditions (singing and listening) rated fellow participants as more trustworthy than those in the poetry or film groups and also that those in active
conditions (singing and poetry) were more cooperative on a prisoners dilemma task than those in passive groups (Anshel and Kipper 1988: 151). The picture that emerges here is consistent with our Durkheimian claim that physically involving rituals are an effective way to create solidarity, and hence continue to be relevant in 21st century group formation. Hopefully, future interdisciplinary research will bridge the gap between empirical science and ethnomusicology, so that we can place functional claims of ritual in an experimental framework (for a recent example see: Xygalatas et al 2013). In the meantime, we can add strength to our inductive arguments by considering relevant empirical studies.

**Totem: Shared Focus of Attention**

Now what does he see about him? On every side those things which appeal to his senses and strike his imagination are the numerous images of the totem (...). Placed thus in the center of the scene, it becomes representative. The sentiments expressed everywhere fix themselves upon it, for it is the only concrete object upon which they can fix themselves. (...) During the ceremony, it is the center of all regards (Durkheim 1912/1965: 250-52)

Durkheim stresses the mutual focus of attention among participants of various rites in Australia. The totem that is the focus is also representative of the group, which King interprets as the participants worshipping not only the divine but also ‘worshipping their own society in celebrating the totem’ (1997: 332). In Collins’s model, mutual focus of attention is the key ingredient in reaching a pulsating shared experience. He describes it as the difference between occasions where ‘emotional contagion’ and ‘rhythmic entrainment build up to high levels, and those in which they
reach only low levels or fail completely’ (2004: 76). In this reasoning, powerful symbols of group identity make particularly effective foci of attention for rituals, as they can associate the participants’ consciousness with the larger whole. A soccer game offers the sporting action, but also the team colors, the badge, and the architecture of the home stadium as de facto totems.

But when inserted into reality, this model faces the problem of the symbols’ distance from the way members wish to conceive of the club. This is most typically experienced as a love of the club and hate of the corporate side of the game that is equally represented by club logos and the image of the players themselves. King offers a simple solution from his research at Manchester United. He found that people ‘sublimated their opposition to the board at Manchester United and its commercial policies by simply excluding them from their totemic image of the club that they loved’ (King 1997: 340). Here, fans had their own associations with the symbols and these were active in the ritual practice. Given that much of the explicit focus of attention is the game itself, it is not necessary for spectators to be distracted by resented connotations. One sees the players as the embodied symbols of the group, and has a personal reaction to this.

At NYCFC, fans have expressed much resentment towards various aspects of the soccer experience, particularly towards the team colors and the (lack of a) stadium. Given the club’s links to the existing Manchester City Football Club, many fans were wary of becoming a subordinate team to them. The initial vice-president of Third Rail, Brian Toto, discusses the broken promises of the ownership in the New York Times: “the jersey comes out, and it’s like, O.K., are we Manchester City? What’s going on? They were going to use the New York City colors” — the dark blue, orange and white of the municipal flag — “and then they throw sky blue in” (in Klein 2015). The
similarity between the NYCFC jersey and Manchester City’s is striking and was felt as a huge blow among fans seeking a distinctive image. In a meeting shortly after the jersey was announced, Third Rail discussed the possibility of boycotting the blue shirts and supporting a purchase of the black away-game jersey instead, though this never emerged. Towards the end of the season I attended a watch party organized by the Blue Ladies. I noticed the majority of attendees wearing the black jersey and asked Emma, the President, if this was meant to create greater distance from Manchester City. She told me it was coordinated but the decision was purely aesthetic, saying: ‘I know some people have the Man City thing but I don't give a shit’ (Personal Communication, Emma Leslie, October 2015, NY, NY). Moreover, while these issues may be resented away from the stadium, when the game is in flow this is far from the minds of fans in mid-ritual. Here, consistent with King’s description above, fans do not dwell on the undesirable aspects of the club’s image while focusing on the team, even where it is so intimately linked with the visual experience.

Organization and Ritual

As mentioned above, Durkheim notes the need for rituals to be repeated periodically. Victor Turner discusses the inevitable consequences of this need to reaffirm the group through recurrent interaction. He suggests that euphoric bonding experience itself ‘soon develops a structure,’ where individuals may begin with casual ties, but these then become ‘norm-governed relationships’ (1969/2008: 132). This is because the feeling is positive and desirable, so participants organize to ‘spell out the optimal social conditions under which such experiences might be expected to flourish and multiply’ (ibid). For Victor Turner, these structures are necessary to progress from “liminality”, a stage of uncertainty where neither the pre-ritual nor emergent
identity fully applies (ibid: 94-5). According to Collins, structured ritual is more effective in group creation than spontaneous occasions, in so far as it affirms stronger boundaries. He suggests spontaneous assembly gives ‘a more fluid sense of membership,’ except when these instances provide opportunities for repetition and symbolism, ‘which thereby tend to make subsequent interactions more formal’ and hence organized (Collins 2004: 50).

This distinction between spontaneous and organized activity has been a major talking point among NYCFC fans, as indicated above. Many have stressed a desire for the singing culture to emerge ‘organically’, in contrast to those who stress the importance of creating something meaningful through organization. After the very first game, an article in Soccer Newsday claims to have heard: ‘hundreds, sometimes thousands, of people erupting in various chants completely organically’ (Chavez 2015). This contradicts my experience of the game, but highlights a popular position that is taken across social media regarding supporters’ culture at NYCFC. Indeed, so central is this issue that the debate goes back to before NYCFC ever played a competitive match. In February 2015, the Third Rail’s first president Chance Michaels posted on the fans forum: ‘we seem to receive as many complaints that we’re being too “organic” as we do that we’re “shoving [songs] down [members’] throats” (Michaels 2015). There has been a great deal of criticism of what I term the ‘organicist’ approach. One NYCFC forum user comments: ‘people constantly talk about organic development but since we aren’t organized enough to try new chants, nothing gets sung’ (nycmade 2015). At one capos’ meeting, Emma criticized the organicist view as romantic, expressing that there is simply no hope of making something special if we are not all on the same page. We can summarize this as:
structure is resented by those who wish for culture to emerge organically, but sought by those who wish to create something big and meaningful.

When considered as ritual, with something like effervescence as the target, we can understand the high stakes involved in-group creation at NYCFC: a self-affirming, yet overwhelming feeling. The capos and influential figures are ritual specialists, whose expertise is used to generate the most impassioned performances. This interpretation helps to understand why sports attracts so many people to expensive trips to stadiums, even though in many cases one gets a better view of the action at home for free. Collins claims that this is most true for “big games”, or ‘a game in which the consequences are considered important and hence one can confidently expect to be part of an excited crowd’ (2004: 57-8). Furthermore, it is clear there is a strong desire for the positive feeling that can be experienced when singing at the stadium is unified and successful. This desire translates into planning, as Victor Turner predicts.

The idea of greater efficacy for regular, formalized rituals has always fit nicely into soccer’s structure of regular ‘home’ games. This is particularly so for the more dedicated fans who purchase season tickets, ensuring they watch each game with the same core group of fellow supporters. For Durkheim, the sentiments brought by the heights reached in collective effervescence will ‘fade away unless they are periodically renewed’ (in Collins 2004: 37). This goes to the core of Victor Turner’s understanding of ritual as: ‘a periodic re-statement of the terms in which men [sic] of a particular culture must interact if there is to be any kind of coherent social life’ (1968/2008: 6). Professional sports matches provide individuals the physical space, the focus of attention and the regularity required for group affirming ritual to occur.
Participation and Standards of Morality

Collins’ model features “standards of morality” as a key consequence of ritual. One application of this model in the ethnomusicology literature is provided with analysis of Sacred Harp singings. For Heider and Warner, these events have the power to turn ‘an unlikely assortment of individuals into a committed group,’ a crucial requirement for 21st century group formation (2010: 86). The presence of many people singing together in emotionally charged circumstances raises the awareness among participants that they are part of a meaningful group. Further, the leader of a song becomes the shared focus of attention, allowing each member greater consciousness of what their peers are experiencing. This results both in high feelings of solidarity and a great respect for Sacred Harp itself. As it functions in an increasingly secular realm, despite its protestant routes, it produces a standard of morality but one which is specific to the singings more than religious lifestyle practices. As the authors note: ‘respect for the ritual itself is paramount’ (ibid: 92).

Likewise, Collinson found a ‘high degree of resentment’ towards those fans ‘who will, for whatever reason, not sing’ during his research at Sydney FC. He summarized this attitude as: ‘authentic fans produce their football culture, they do not just consume it’ (Collinson 2009: 18). Wilson, in his research on US football fans’ complaints about the MLS, found a lack of participation form supporters to be the biggest issue. He states that most online discussion laments a lack of ‘passion’ and intensity from the crowd, and too many ‘laid back fans’ (Wilson 2007: 388). Simply, members of the group hold expectations of behavior of their fellow members. Some of these involve song and the appropriate respect given to the team as well as the ritual performance itself. As Collins puts it: ‘failure to respect them is a quick test of
non-membership in the group’, and this is likely to be particularly problematic where most members are in the midst of excited participation (2004: 109, 49).

This is consistent with my findings at NYCFC, where at several games throughout the season I’ve heard people screaming: ‘why wont you sing?!’ at their fellow supporters during quiet periods. Non-participation provokes anger because *respecting the ritual is paramount* and nothing undermines this like silence. Hence, some supporters appear to be “doing it wrong” in the eyes of others. At a meeting of capos in April, there was much talk of resentment towards a handful of people in the front of the supporters’ section who do not sing. It was agreed that we would try to create a singing core starting with first 15 rows, whereby we encourage those who wish to be quiet to stand higher up or at the back. Jonny referred to this as ‘policing ourselves.’34 This conversation then turned towards a general critique of one block of the supporters’ section: section 237 who have developed a strong reputation of silence. It was agreed that shouting criticism at them (me!) was not helpful despite its temptation and a more constructive approach may be helpful. This conversation shows clearly that it is not enough to wear the same colors and support the same team in order for supporters to form a meaningful group because it takes more to be widely accepted as a group member. Moreover, the solidarity experienced by those who do participate leads to resentment towards those who do not as they are perceived to be diminishing the value of the ritual experience.

As the social identity approach argues, groups depend on an agreement among members that they share a categorization. For some loud voices in the stands at Yankee Stadium, ritualistic behavior through participation in song is an expectation that must be met for people to be accepted as a cooperator on the project of group

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34 Notes from Capo’s meeting NY, NY, April 22 2015.
creation. In other words, the project uses ritual to create the group and those who do not sing along impair its success.

Summary

Despite its complicated history, ritual is still a fruitful term for analysis in ethnomusicology. We have experimental evidence for the cohesive function of bodily coordination, and a wealth of analogical evidence for this effect in social circumstances. Successful singing performances at NYCFC combine a shared focus on group symbols with bodily coordination and repetition to produce a positive feeling that participants share. At its height this can be euphoric, such as I experienced with the introduction of a hero in Andrea Pirlo. But even without this level, a more “mundane” ritual lower down the intensity scale still seeks to operate the elements as discussed in other soccer-fan ethnographies. Ritual participants have to contend with negative connotations of the symbols, some resentment towards the ritual structure, and worst of all, the silence of the minority who just want to watch the game. Indeed, these could be realities that typify 21st century urban group ritual, where boundaries and conventions are never set in stone. Despite these complications, the performance of fandom at NYCFC is the ritual performance of song; the group norms are ritual performances. The awareness that this powerful feeling is shared fosters bonds among individuals, encourages organization and realizes the new social identity of NYCFC fandom.
Conclusion

This thesis has examined the construction of a singing culture at NYCFC over the course of its inaugural season in the MLS. We have seen that the concept of place rises from the territorial idea of New York City, channels through the performance of song into an atmosphere of New York soccer fandom. This topophilic, experienced place is then a foundation for the many thousands of people who sing it into creation to unite in shared passion for city and club. In this case, the sudden emergence of a new institution has swept into the hearts of people who wish for the chance to meet, bond, and share a strong, long-term identification. Rather than categorize this as a community, this thesis has chosen to present NYCFC fandom as a social identity, an approach that does more justice to the fluidity of 21st century life and self-concepts. Here, we have seen that categorization as a fan has triggered a process in which conventions are sought and constructed by fans. This involves the accentuation of singing itself, whereby participation in song comes to define being-in-the-group, as well as the tussle for a standardized repertoire through deductive, inductive and projected processes.

This process enables the realization of large-scale coordinated performances, as songs are sung by thousands of people at once. At its most effective, this produces a powerful feeling of unity and the sense of being a part of something special. NYCFC fandom enacts itself through these performances, striding towards the incredible heights achieved at the most successful moments. Yet the early stages of this has been characterized also by disunity, where colliding narratives have not always been able to compromise. At times this has resulted in overlapping sub-cultures who feel they have more in common within themselves, a more similar account of what musical style they wish to perform. But ultimately, diverse individuals have expressed their
interpretations of the converging worlds of soccer fandom and New York City, negotiating a shared musical culture to give meaning to a new social identity. Such an account highlights the crossover and potential homology between ritual performance and socially normative behavior, which in this case manifests musically.
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Appendix

(Courtesy of nycfc.com/tickets)