

## Nightlife Ethnography, Violence, Policing and Security

*Stephen Tomsen and Phillip Wadds*

### **Western Sydney, Tomsen, 4 July 1989: 1am**

Tuesday night was \$1 drinks night with almost 800 patrons present and at least one-third of them very intoxicated. Soon enough an argument developed on the dance floor. A loud youth and numerous friends objected to some act by a small and very drunk teenage male who was followed to the door. If seeking protection he was soon disappointed. He was surrounded and trapped by a menacing crowd of men that included onlookers and half a dozen amused bouncers. While not looking he was punched to the head, fell dazed into a concrete wall and bled profusely from a head wound. The only intervention came from a bystander who told the assailant that he had finished his 'cheap shot'. Somehow the victim stumbled back to the door of the venue to clean up or find refuge inside. This finally prompted one of the bouncers to react. He shoved the swaying victim back on the ground, threw a shoe lost in the attack at his face, and shouted 'fuck off'.

Eventually a sober friend of the victim emerged from inside. In desperation he ran towards a police car slowly patrolling nearby with officers clearly viewing the events from about 30 metres away. They quickly revved the engine and sped off leaving him standing alone in the street. Luckily, the victim and his friend found their own taxi and escaped. At 3am bouncers were still standing about yawning, pointing to a pool of blood and grinning stupidly at the stains on the wall.

### **Kings Cross, Wadds, 24 January 2009: 11.30pm**

At the top of the escalator is your first glimpse of the neon highway that is Darlinghurst Road, the main artery of the notorious Kings Cross entertainment precinct. Two large billboards at the exit to the train station warn night-goers of the potential harms associated with binge drinking and drug consumption, a sentiment almost entirely lost on a crowd of consumers converging on the most popular site of mass intoxication Sydney has to offer. ...

It's 4am. Throngs of inebriated revellers litter the gutters of Darlinghurst Road, their faces portraying a mix of confusion, exhaustion and discomfort. It's been a long night, and for all the wrong reasons. I have just finished being interrogated by police officers after a female patron at the bar I was drinking at

This is a preview. Not all pages are shown.

The new level of public attention links with the wider range of people in nightlife: crowds of revellers no longer solely comprise groups of young working class and marginal men less likely to evince public sympathy as victims in cases of violence. An intriguing further reason for this spreading interest is the rise of new electronic surveillance and media. Images and film footage of public conflicts and assaults as social spectacle incite a range of emotions and reactions that include excitement, disgust and alarm and further demands for police and political action to counter violence. This is especially the case when attacks are directed against seemingly legitimate victims and take place in what are perceived to be more respectable and gentrified urban settings. This violence is now openly debated with a range of interest groups and commentators asking questions about its previously assumed inevitability. The new mobilisation of public concern and victim advocacy is historically surprising. This can be invoked and or even distorted to reinforce individualistic law and order measures such as the enactment of a mandatory sentencing response in dealing with charged assailants. It can also be useful in furthering support for a range of challenges (such as the *One Punch Can Kill* and *Last Drinks* campaigns in Queensland and New South Wales) to the aggressive masculinities that have permeated Australia's nightlife.

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