LISTENING IN THE LIVING ROOM: THE PURSUIT OF AUTHENTIC SPACES AND SOUNDS IN DALLAS/FORT WORTH (DFW) DO -IT-YOURSELF (DIY) PUNK ROCK

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In the Dallas/Fort Worth (DFW) do-it-yourself (DIY) punk scene, participants attempt to adhere to notions of authenticity that dictate whether a band, record label, performance venue, or individual are in compliance with punk philosophy. These guiding principles champion individual expression, contributions to one's community (scene), independence from the mainstream music industry and consumerism, and the celebration of amateurism and the idea that everyone should "do it yourself." While each city or scene has its own punk culture, participants draw on their perceptions of the historic legacy of punk and on experiences with contemporaries from around the world. For this thesis, I emphasize the significance of performance spaces and the sonic aesthetic of the music in enacting and reinforcing notions of punk authenticity. The live performance of music is perceived as the most authentic setting for punk music, and bands go to great lengths to recreate this soundscape in the recording studio. Bands achieve this sense of liveness by recording as a group, rather than individually for a polished studio sound mix, or by inviting friends and fans into the studio to help record a live show experience. House venues have been key to the development of the DFW scene with an emphasis on individual participation through hosting concerts in their homes. This creates a stronger sense of community in DIY punk performance. Through participation observation, interviews, analysis of source materials, as well as research in previous Punk scholarship, questions of authenticity, consumerism, and technology and sound studies, this thesis updates

work on the experience of sound, listening, and the importance of space in DIY punk communities today.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In dank dive bars and cramped one-story houses the sounds of screeching guitars and wobbling cymbals emanate out and permeate the soundscape of North Texas. In these spaces, bodies press up against each other as one as they physically resonate with fellow listeners. These experiences galvanize participants in a collective feeling of ecstasy where the smell of cheap beer and cigarette smoke become sensual indices to camaraderie which is central to the ambiance. Personal space becomes a foreign notion in these places, as strangers grasp and support each other in the audience. Alan O'Connor offers a simplistic definition of punk, which addresses its ability to transcend specific communities and time periods. He defines punk as, "an activity or series of activities that take place in time" (2008, 1). O'Connor's quote speaks to the temporal immediacy of punk performance. Beyond the style of clothes, timbre of music, or type of venue, authenticity comes from the experience. It is my contention that authenticity is found in the musical moment, where people come together through participation with the aforementioned style, sound, and spaces serving this experience. The typical do-it-yourself (DIY) punk scene emphasizes the experiential and participatory in music in an effort to encourage people to engage with each other in music making and performances. This scene challenges mainstream conceptions of music that often create clear distinctions between artist and audience. The character of this scene can be found in its name, which implores followers to be authentic and "do it yourself."

The pursuit of the authentic is a common theme for bands and fans in the DIY punk scene, who perceive notions of authenticity as essential to the survival of punk. Punk culture

emerged out of the 1970s music climate where virtuosic musicians and elaborate stage performances by touring super groups were championed as the norm for rock music performance. Additionally, the do-it-yourself distinction (DIY), while often synonymous with punk, is applied to signify a band's commitment to remain outside the influence of the mainstream music industry and take an active role in the creation of music and art. As Stephen Duncombe writes, "doing it yourself is at once a critique of the dominant mode of passive consumer culture and something far more important: the active creation of an alternative culture" (2008, 124). Punk at this time was a response to a music industry that was perceived to be monopolizing every aspect of music performance. It was a reemphasis on local scenes and the democratization of the music experience for everyone. In these scenes, musicianship was a luxury, if not a burden, as everyone was encouraged to participate. The sonic features of punk music reinforced amateurism, "the increase in volume and the subsequent loss in importance of singing contributed to observers' conclusions that punk was demystifying recording, embracing an aesthetic of amateurism and expressing authentic outrage at the world" (Pottie 1993, 5). It is the personal relationships that encourage participation that are at the crux of punk authenticity and a guiding force to the scene.

The thesis begins by exploring the development of punk culture and how the values of punk participants inform notions of authenticity within the DIY punk scene. The quest to be authentic and the critique of the inauthentic have been incredibly important to the development of the punk character and provided guidelines for participants to live their lives in a fulfilling and authentic manner. In the second chapter, I examine the spaces in the Denton-DFW metroplex where DIY punk music performances occur. I discuss the preferred spaces for

DIY punk performance with particular emphasis on the impact of house show venues on the local scene. House shows have allowed participants more control over the organizing of shows and have added a unique and personal character to performances. In the third chapter, I delve into the experience of my interlocutors' performances. Musicians are particularly cognizant of how their live performances inspire participants to step-out of an individualized experience. I place particular emphasis on the sonic aesthetic, which creates a totalizing sensual experience for other participants and extra-musical sounds, or "noise," are a key method by which punk musicians bring listeners into a collective and immediate experience. In the final chapter, I discuss how musicians translate the experience of live shows into the studio in a quest to produce authentic recordings. The emphasis on live performance and the experiential in DIY punk presents a challenge to musicians trying to capture that experience in the mediated and exclusive space of the recording studio. In response, musicians I worked with employ a number of strategies to simulate the soundscape of live performances, such as simulating crowd noise on recordings. These strategies emphasize the role of the listener in the music and adhere to important ideological tenets of punk culture that encourage participation. Notions of authenticity in DIY punk reflect central punk tenets of individuality and independence from mainstream culture. My discussion explores how these tenets are expressed through performance and the experience of sound, listening, and space.

1.1. Literature Review

Previous studies, such as Dick Hebdige's 1979 book, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, have explored the attitudes and fashion of punk fans. For Hebdige, punk style and attitude is a contestation of societal norms that, through reproduction in society, come to be perceived as

natural, “It is through [naturalization] that particular ways of organizing the world appear to us as if they were universal and timeless” (Hebdige 1979, 14). Punk creates a new aesthetic through a process of *bricolage*, that is the combining of different material items and symbols challenging their previous associations. Hebdige, extending Roland Barthes’ work, further posits that through the features of punk style, such as ripped t-shirts or wearing safety pins and other styles perceived as antithetical to mainstream constructions of the desirable, punks challenge the idea that normative aesthetic preferences are the only correct perspective (ibid, 102). This is a recurring theme in punk culture where the question of “What is punk?” becomes a shifting target. For contemporary punk participants, the challenge of social norms often extends to self-parody. In William Ryan Force’s article (2009), “Consumption Styles and the Fluid Complexity of Punk Authenticity,” he highlights postmodern elements, such as self-parodying and the recycling of cultural images to create “shocking juxtaposition,” that are pervasive in punk culture and which manifest themselves in discourse among participants.

One example in Force’s discussion describes a participant who wears sandals to a performance, instead of the Converse-brand sneakers most punks wear, who states that she is not conforming to the appropriate punk uniform (Force 2009, 200). By not conforming to punk style, she claims her choice is authentic to punk’s values of individual choice and subverting normative punk behavior. Force’s example illustrates conflicts in how authenticity is understood by participants when attempting to reconcile punk’s championed individuality with the idea of punk as a uniform culture. In this work, conversations between fans demonstrate how authenticity functions within punk culture, and how participants invoke punk belief systems to achieve certain goals such as attempts to advance their own status within the

culture or to protect it from mainstream appropriation. While Force and Hebdige both address manifestations of authenticity in how participants articulate punk ideology through discourse, fashion, signs, and artifacts, I offer here an exploration of indexical associations they attach to the sonic expression of punk as performed and experienced live and in the studio.

Beyond the sonic experience, the types of venues used by punk musicians are also informed by DIY ideology, which encourages political activism and community engagement in addressing social issues. Kenneth R. Culton and Ben Holtzman's work in the Long Island DIY scene explored the prevalence of house shows within the punk scene in the late 1990s and early 2000s, and their attempts to circumvent enterprising promoters and club owners by hosting performances at participants' houses. Culton and Holtzman also address the shortcomings of the Long Island DIY scene to create free spaces for musical and artistic expression for participants. For example, the political activism associated with the scene's left-leaning participants, which was initially a central part of the scene's mission, was quickly marginalized as participants focused more on their own personal relations as opposed to living up to a particular ideology (Culton and Holtzman 277, 2010). Culton and Holtzman's work illustrates the importance of DIY spaces in upholding a punk philosophy, and how these spaces ultimately come to reflect the values of the communities often in opposition to the preferences of the people who found and/or operate the space. A recurring theme throughout these types of venues, and which emerges in my own research, is the participant's indifference to the larger DIY ideology beyond simply enjoying the music.

In my interviews with operators of DIY clubs, which are typically repurposed buildings that are owned and operated by members of the scene, they problematized the lack of

commitment to the DIY ethic they sometimes perceive in house shows, which were characterized as devolving occasionally into merely "parties." Beyond just offering musical performances, DIY clubs also offer services to the community such as lending libraries, a meeting space for local activists, and sponsoring clothing drives for the homeless. For these operators, an authentic DIY belief system extends beyond music, where participants collectively solve issues facing their communities. These differences in the perceived role of participants, regarding individual's commitment to the DIY ethic, continue to influence how venues are organized and how they allocate their resources. Similar to Culton and Holtzman, my study seeks to understand how the operation and function of these performance spaces are used to adhere to the larger DIY punk ideology.

Whether it is a house venue or a club, the acoustic features of the space are imperative in upholding punk ideals and providing an authentic experience to punk participants. In one study, Steve Sakakeeny observes the funeral marches of New Orleans, and how the musicians playing in these marching bands interact with their environments. His study is particularly unique in its discussion of how working-class residents grapple with the gentrification of their neighborhood, leading to the construction of a highway that runs through it. They utilize the acoustics of the new overpass to create a sonic presence during marches. These participants negotiate the changing space of their neighborhood by amplifying their voices, while also using the acoustics of the overpass to provide a sonic climax to their performance events. For my own project, Sakakeeny's work demonstrates how participants can navigate and manipulate their space in an effort to achieve a sonic effect, to provide an affective experience, or assert a collective presence.

Engaging the sonic aesthetic of a music culture offers the researcher insight into how listeners interact with each other and their soundscape. Previous scholarship in sound studies has detailed ways in which participants implement elements of technology and sound production to accomplish certain goals, or to communicate affect or ideological messages to their audience (Novak 2013; Taylor 2001; Stuhl 2014; Greene 1999; Mueller 2015). In my research, and in previous scholarship, musicians have used these technologies in an effort to capture the experience of a live performance on their records. Simulating liveness, in my research, is a way of giving voice to the audience and by amplifying the space of the live performance and the interaction between musician and audience. As detailed by performance studies scholar Philip Auslander, the development of new technologies has complicated definitions of liveness. However, Auslander defines liveness as, "a sense of always being connected to other people, of continuous, technologically mediated temporal co-presence with others known and unknown" (2012, 6). Understood in this way, liveness indexes the experiential and social aspects of making music together.

A number of strategies exist in order to simulate liveness in the sterile space of the studio. For example, Thomas Porcello's work in an Austin recording studio demonstrates how recording engineers attempt to simulate the experience of live performance in recordings to index a more authentic recorded experience for listeners. Part of Porcello's discussion centers on the engineering practice of "recording the room," where the acoustics of the space are recorded by microphones setup by an audio engineer to capture the reverberant sound, "…sounds not carrying reverberation information that is part of one's normal listening experience are judged as artificial; working with ambience, then, is crucial to the

psychoacoustic perception of liveness" (Porcello 2002, 75-76). This practice, as detailed by Porcello, reinforces that the music being recorded happens in a physical space, where the experience of the sound taps into people's indexical associations of liveness being sincere and authentic. My own research extends Porcello's understanding of liveness by treating the performance space and audience as an instrument, as well as exploring more deeply the referential significance of non-musical sounds in punk recordings. Inquiries into sound elucidate how notions of authenticity and sincerity[1] manifest themselves in the experience of sound. Sound is the genesis of these notions, where the values of culture are expressed in a visceral and experiential way.

This project also explores the experience of live performances that musicians strive to recreate in the studio. In particular, I examine how musicians use extra-musical tones and brash timbres, what is often referred to as "noise," to both parody and/or redefine these "undesirable" sounds to create a collective experience for listeners. In social science scholarship, a general definition of noise is largely murky, but for my purposes the often cited "undesirable sound" aspect is applicable. Jacques Attali's 1985 book, *Noise*, emphasized the epistemological potentials of noise as "an instrument of understanding, [the organization of noise] prompts us to decipher a sound form of knowledge" (1985, 4). Attali advocated for listening as crucial to gaining a holistic understanding, and even claimed noise as prophetic in predicting discord in society (ibid). In public discourse, and in scholarship, noise has been indexical to the sounds of war, and used to silence the voices of enemies (Russolo 1914; Schafer

[1] Throughout my fieldwork, authenticity in the DIY punk scene is deeply tied to the perceived honesty or sincerity of the artist. These characterizations become tied to authentic performance where an artist's intent is weighted in the quality of the music.

1977; Goodman 2010). David Novak further explored perceptions of noise and its relation to human beings asserting, “Noise is culture; noise is communication; noise is music” (2015, 133). In punk performances, the overwhelming of the senses through different undesirable sounds (i.e. shouting, distorting voices and sample music, street sounds, etc.) is used to disorient the listener and bring them out from an internalized experience, through what Julian Henriques termed as “sonic dominance” (Henriques 2003). It is also a key way through which musicians simulate the aural experience of a live show and is used by punk musicians to invoke the perception of sincerity tied to live performance. My interviews and observations of punks in the studio uncovered the simulation of audience noise, the substituting of instruments with sounds heard at clubs such as wooden chairs, and the incorporation of audio feedback overdubbed into recordings as a means of transporting the listener into the soundscape of a live performance. My inquiry addresses how punk participants create an aesthetic and live performance that positions them as outside the mainstream music industry and encourages a connection between listeners.

1.2. The Bands

Within punk culture there exists a number of different subcultures that espouse different values and conceptions of what is authentically “punk.” During my fieldwork, I spoke with a number of DIY punk groups from around the Dallas-Fort Worth (DFW) metroplex and narrowed my focus on the experiences of five bands from the area: Not Half Bad (Fort Worth), The Wee-Beasties (Denton), Thin Skin (Denton), Thyroids (Dallas), and Same Brain (Fort Worth). These groups represent different factions of the DIY scene in DFW, but each band’s sonic aesthetic emphasizes the lo-fi sounds associated with punk culture. I have attempted to reflect

the diverse perspectives of the different punk subcultures that exist in the Dallas/Fort Worth DIY scene through these bands. These groups range in character from "pop-punk" to "psychedelic." Members of the groups discussed here also work a day job in order to fund their recording and touring. Each of these groups ranks differently on the punk spectrum, but it is ultimately my contention that one of the main threads connecting all of these different groups is their emphasis on participation.

Not Half Bad, from Fort Worth, is an established punk group in the DFW metroplex having toured and recorded extensively. At the time of my interview, I spoke with Alex Weymier and Matt Scifres who have been the creative forces behind the group for several years. Since the time of my interview, Alex Weymier has left the group and formed the band Better Now which, according to their Bandcamp page[2], is a self-described pop-punk/emo band. Not Half Bad has a significant following, over 3,000 likes on the social media website Facebook, and have connections to several prominent national touring DIY punk bands such as Bomb the Music Industry. Not Half Bad espouses traditional DIY tenets of community-building and leftist political activism. Their shows are characterized by their engaging stage banter, for which they have won an award[3], and incredibly personal connections between audience and band. A particularly striking visual occurs during performances of their acoustic song "Punk Rock is a Full-Time Job" which features only a guitar. During this song, Matt gathers the audience in a circle, with him sitting in the center, and encourages the crowd to sing the song with him in

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[2] Bandcamp is a website that allows musicians to offer their music for download. The website is popular with musicians and fans from a variety of different genres. On this site, prices for the material are set by the publisher.

[3] Gjestland, Krista. 2015. "End of the Year: Red Scare weighs in on the best of 2015." *For the Love of Punk*. Accessed December 21, 2016. http://www.fortheloveofpunk.com/end-of-the-year-red-scare-weighs-in-on-the-best-of-2015/

what becomes reminiscent of singing around a campfire. The immediacy of the performance, where the attendees are brought together sonically through the singing of the entire room, creates an active experience of the music where the musical moment becomes palpable for all present. For Not Half Bad, music should emphasize personal connections and shared experiences that create an intimate relationship between artist and audience.

The Wee-Beasties and Thin Skin perceive their live shows as part performance art. The Wee-Beasties are a formative punk group in the Denton area who are well-known for their stage antics and salacious performances. For example, during my first experience at a Wee-Beasties show as a teenager, members of the band asked a female attendee next to me to lend them her underwear. The male vocalist then took the stage only wearing this attendee's underwear. Everything about The Wee-Beasties is meant to shock their audience, but that shock is meant to create an environment that pulls attendees out of their normative sensibilities and to fully participate with the band. The brash horns mixed with the quintessential punk aesthetic of fast tempos, distorted guitars, and shouted vocals creates an urgency that overpowers the audience. Additionally, while The Wee-Beasties incorporate a horn section into their band, they steadfastly refuse the label of "ska band"[4] and assert their affiliation to punk culture and its connotations of resistance and lewd behavior. The Wee-Beasties continue to be an influential group, particularly in the Denton scene, performing in

[4] In the 1980s third-wave ska became popular among punk circles. Third-wave ska often borrowed aesthetic sensibilities from punk and led to the labeling of any punk group with a horn section as a ska band. Considered something of a fad, formative punk/ska group The Arrogant Sons of Bitches lampooned the pursuit of fads in the punk scene in their song "Go Ska."

several large festivals in Denton and at national festivals such as the Warped Tour, and they often play shows with other influential Denton bands such as Brave Combo.

Alternatively, Thin Skin, also from Denton, aligns with the art scene in the city. Thin Skin is composed of two women, Katie and Ashley, who front the band on guitar and bass with Cesar, who plays drums. While advocating for women in punk music, Thin Skin pushed back against being labeled a "girl" band wanting to eschew any label which they believe confines their ability to express themselves. During our interview, the topic of virtuosity was addressed frequently with the musicians discussing their different influences from punk's past. Thin Skin exemplifies the "just start a band" mentality that has been a cornerstone of punk culture as each of the three members confided that they had little to no prior experience on their respective instrument upon starting the band. Referring to their lack of musical experience, Katie Reese commented, "We are going to mess up every show" (Hallock 2015). Thin Skin's lack of experience in playing their instruments has created an interesting aesthetic for their music which is often loud and unrelenting. They challenge listeners to expand their perceptions of what music and performance can be and as a result they are closely aligned with the Denton noise music scene. Similar to Not Half Bad, Thin Skin's lyrics often center on social issues which range from critiques of politicians to criticisms about the representation of women in popular culture.

Thyroids and Same Brain align themselves with garage band/psychedelic culture where lo-fi is the preferred aesthetic. For example, Thyroids recorded their first E.P. in a storage facility, which they finished in only a single midnight recording session. Same Brain explained this aesthetic preference saying, "The very word 'garage' didn't mean 'let's go into a place

that's not like a garage'… [When you go into a 'fancy' studio] you're no longer a garage punk band.[5]" As I will explore in the next chapter, these bands are heavily influenced by punk's past. The sounds and philosophies of these predecessors continue to frame perceptions of what these musicians believe to be authentic. These two groups represent the burgeoning psychedelic/garage scene that has sprouted up around DFW recently. Both of these groups are meticulous about their live performances and the experience of the listener during their sets. Emphasis, for these two groups, was placed on the way in which their set was experienced by attendees. They both spoke of strategies they employed, both performative and sonic, that were designed to encourage participation from attendees.

Thyroids, originally from Garland and now Dallas, is made up of three musicians (Kenny Ramirez on guitar, Deborah Tamayo on bass, Mark Bitner on drums) who have performed in different DFW punk groups over the past several years. When asked about their influences they provided an eclectic list that ranged from surf rock to jazz drummer Gene Krupa and credited growing up in a working-class community in Garland, which they say instilled in them a working-class "Garland Attitude" (Pena 2017). It is quite typical of most DIY bands, given their emphasis on scene-building, to emphasize their city of origin. Fort Worth band Same Brain, who frequently perform with Thyroids, seek a more psychedelic timbre to their music than the other groups listed. Steve Steward of *The Fort Worth Weekly* wrote, "the impression I got from their set was that Same Brain was a psych-rock band that ventured into perception-fucking time signatures and the abstract sonic splatter that happens when you try to make guitars sound like something other than guitars" (Steward 2017). Same Brain varies from these other groups in

[5] Interview with Same Brain, Fort Worth, July 3, 2016

that a number of their songs are four minutes or longer in duration. Both Thyroids and Same Brain are also heavily influenced by punk's historic relationship to skateboarding and cited their experiences in skating as influential to their own music. During our interviews, I was struck by the similarity between the two group's responses to my questions who credited each other as influences on their own music.

1.3 Methodology

This project relies on fieldwork conducted from 2014 to 2017, during which I conducted interviews and observed a number of performances by local musicians and fans in attendance. While the nexus of this project is the fieldwork, I also consult contemporary and archival publications on DIY and punk culture, as well as sound recording and production. These publications include fanzines, posters, editorials, and various other writings by punk participants and journalists, as well as video recordings of performances and interviews conducted by various media outlets. Beyond publications or interviews, I took a participant-observation approach in this ethnography, with the aim of emphasizing the experiential aspects of DIY culture through first-hand knowledge. While not performing with these bands, my engagement stems largely from the participatory nature of DIY punk performance at clubs and house concerts, which encourages audience members to interact with performers and fosters shared experiences at events. My ethnography emphasizes the importance of performance spaces, increasingly house venues, as indicative of the values of the scene which are perceived as being more accessible and less profit-driven compared to bars. It is my aim that by emphasizing first-hand experience this facilitates research that may not be gleaned from a

simple objective interrogation of individual subjects. Instead, I strive to capture the nuances only available through the experience of house show performances.

My interviews with these groups focused on their perception of punk culture, how they construct experience through their sound and setup, their preferred type of performance venue, as well as a discussion of how they perceive and talk about sound. I conducted feedback interviews with musicians, during which I played them footage of previous sets in order to understand their perception of the performance and the motivations for their sound and performative choices. In these interviews, musicians expressed different positions on their affiliation and sense of responsibility to the larger punk culture but all espoused and celebrated the punk philosophy that everyone, performers and fans, should participate in the making of music.

I interviewed audio engineers, who are often musicians themselves, detailing their experiences with creating what they consider to be authentic recordings and mixes for punk bands. These interviews uncovered a disparity in recording practices among different punk groups, but all with the common belief that recording should be an authentically "do it yourself" endeavor. I include the perspective of venue operators, exploring how they construct authentic punk spaces and new ways of listening. These interviews detail how spaces are physically constructed to be conducive to live experience, how house shows offer a more intimate experience for participants, as well as how they craft a character of the space by offering amenities in addition to staging performances. Given the nature of DIY punk music, which encourages all participants to perform the role of listener and musician, these interviews engaged my interlocutors in their experience of punk performance in both roles. DIY punk

culture is unique in this way, where the audience is deeply invested and knowledgeable about the scene. The way in which a band interacts with its audience is crucial to how they index authenticity. Bands will often reference specific audience members, or share inside jokes, that reinforce the sense that participants are friends and equals. This dispels any notion of the "rock star mentality." While the perspectives of my interviewees are well-represented, my aim in this project is to extend beyond the subjective interpretation of individual actors and bring my discussion into an intersubjective milieu.

CHAPTER 2

PERFORMING AUTHENTICITY IN THE DFW PUNK SCENE

Surrounded by squeaky tables and sticky floors, I sat across from Matt Scifres and Alex Weymier of Not Half Bad, a popular do-it-yourself (DIY) punk outfit from the Dallas/Fort Worth (DFW) metroplex. "Authenticity is everything," Matt Scifres told me. This sentiment, expressed so succinctly, is commonly heard among musicians and fans in this scene. Authenticity for them is not blind adherence to an aesthetic style, or a particular political ideology, but rather the upholding of the ideal that everyone should be encouraged to participate. In this chapter, I delve into how authenticity is defined in scholarship, I explore notions of punk authenticity and how these inform the way in which the culture of punk has developed. Likewise, I examine how my interlocutors discuss authenticity and how efforts to sound and appear "authentic" impact the choices they make with their music and performance.

The various sub-genres of punk music have crafted different ethics, and with that, different performances of authenticity. For members of the straight-edge scene[6], authenticity can be performed through the refusal of consuming illicit drugs or alcohol and refraining from casual sexual intercourse. For these participants, the refusal of these "pollutants" allow them to be their "authentic selves" without dependence on other substances to construct their identity. For GG Allin, a prominent punk musician from the 1980s, authenticity in punk meant the obstruction of societal norms that he perceived as limiting society. In a famous interview with Jerry Springer, Allin remarked, "My mission is to put danger back in rock and roll… I use my rock and roll as a weapon against society, the government, and the industry itself" (Allin 1993). The

[6] A movement in punk that encouraged followers to abstain from alcohol, illicit substances, and promiscuous sex.

overall tone of this interview, and the rhetoric espoused by Allin, suggests an existential crisis in society that can only be remedied with the chaos and unmediated performance of authentic rock music. Although just two perspectives, they illustrate a larger trend in punk where the perception of authenticity relies on how one defines being authentic in music. Authenticity is such a contested issue because in a culture that encourages one to do it themselves, the act of defining what is authentic is constructed differently by each person. Therefore, depending on the perspective of one's interlocutor, the "authentic" can be defined in any number of different and often contradictory ways.

2.1 Punk Authenticity Then and Now

In this section, I want to briefly explore punk's past and how it is manifested in contemporary culture to convey authenticity. During my fieldwork, musicians often credited friend's bands as an influence. "Have you heard of…?" followed by a short anecdote became a frequent segue during interviews discussing formative shows and music that had influenced these musicians in their lifetime. However, a professed association with punk and conscious attempts to adhere to a DIY ethic ties them to a larger punk culture that emerged in the late 1970s and whose legacy is constantly reimagined and applied by contemporary punk musicians. Ultimately, the way these musicians talk, listen, and think about music is informed by punk's history and how the culture has defined, and then constantly redefined, authentic performance.

A familiar narrative about punk places the genesis of the genre with the Sex Pistols in late 1970s London, or in New York with The Ramones slightly earlier in the decade. These two groups offered an alternative to the major-label bands of the time period (e.g. Pink Floyd) and

challenged their listeners to become more active in their musical experience, as opposed to the increasingly passive experience offered by major label bands performing in large arenas. Often called the "Blank Generation" in Britain due to the lack of economic opportunity for youth during the era, punk offered its adherents agency in a society that had increasingly marginalized and exploited the working class. Jon Savage sums up this notion in the introduction to his seminal book *England's Dreaming, Revised Edition: Anarchy, Sex Pistols, and Beyond,*

> Punk was the international outsider aesthetic: dark, tribal, alienated, alien, full of black humor… For anyone in the UK at that point who felt cast out because of class, sexuality, perception, gender, even choice, who felt useless, unworthy, ashamed, the Sex Pistols were an attraction/repulsion machine of, as Paul Morley notes, 'infernal' power that offered the chance of action, even surrender-to something larger than you- and thus possible transcendence. In becoming a nightmare, you could find your dreams.[7]

As evidenced in the preceding quote, and a recurring theme throughout my research, punk offers its adherents an identity and a sense of purpose in direct contestation to a mainstream society that attempts to silence them. However, for all of its celebration of independence, punk is equally insistent on the importance of community. Referencing the previous quote, in the word "surrender" a particularly contentious question that continues to divide adherents around who can be considered authentically punk is brought to the forefront: How can you be punk if you surrender your individuality to a collective identity?

As Stephen Duncombe writes in his 2008 book, *Notes from Underground,* "punks are in a predicament: being a punk means you define yourself against society as an individual, but it also means you define yourself as being part of a group" (68). The preceding quote has plagued early pioneers, many of whom were coopted by the music industry (Barrett 2013 26-27).

[7] (Savage 2001, xiv)

However, in the 1980s, after punk's initial wave and cooptation, punk's pursuit of independence is criticized for leading to a sacrificing of individuality often in violent and destructive ways (Barrett 2013, 27). These incidences contradicted the inclusivity that had been crucial to early punks with the perpetuation of violence by various punk subcultures, including skin-heads. This type of evolution in punk has led to criticisms about the mission, significance, and success of the punk movement. In a provocative article in the *Seattle Times* (2013) by musician John Roderick entitled, "Punk Rock is Bullshit: How a Toxic Social Movement Poisoned Our Culture," he condemns punk for its cultural impact which Roderick contends is a frivolous quest for authenticity that only serves to quell artistic freedom. "Punk-rock culture is the ultimate slow-acting venom, dulling our expectations by narrowing the aperture of 'cool' and neutering our taste by sneering at new flavors until every expression of actual individualism is corralled and expunged in favor of group-think conformity," he wrote. Roderick goes on to criticize punk's lack of ability to exact the kind of revolution that it sought out as well as the contention of many punks that they were attempting to demonstrate a new type of business model through the DIY ethic. For Roderick, punk culture not only didn't accomplish its goal of imbuing individuals with the freedom to create, but rather it created another obstacle, by demanding adherence to its strict code, that individuals had to consider in their creation of art. In this sense, the desire to "be punk" is a deterrent to being oneself.

One of Roderick's chief criticisms of punk culture is that he does not perceive it as having been effective at stopping the toxic aspects of our society (Reaganism and Thatcherism are both listed by Roderick), or enacting the kind of social change that its adherents claimed they were working towards. Roderick's assertion highlights an interesting contrast between

punk's genesis and punk's present. Kelton Sears, another writer for the *Seattle Weekly,* responded to Roderick's criticism, "I did not grow up in the shadow of the baby boom… We grew up in the shadow of the Great Recession. We grew up in the shadow of unchecked climate change caused by unchecked capitalism… Perhaps Roderick's punk was bullshit. But this isn't the UK circa 1976" (Sears 2014). This quote by Sears draws a sharp contrast between the early generation of punks and the present generation. In the article, the effect of Sears' perspective is to construct these earlier generations as ultimately becoming part of the system that motivates contemporary punk participants to critique society.

When put in context, John Roderick, who is himself a rock musician that has been attached to major music labels, seems to be justifying his own artistic choices and decision to participate in the mainstream music industry. Roderick's article, "Punk Rock is Bullshit," has received several responses from other journalists as well as on punk message boards which criticize his condemnation of punk. However, those responding to Roderick have conceded to his critique of punk's "group-think," acquiescing its "echo chamber of dogma" that shackles punk participants to adhere to strict notions of authenticity or be condemned as a poser (Schweitzer 2013). Roderick 's article, and the responses to it, highlights a contentious topic in DIY punk culture that attempts to find the significance in all of it. Numerous documentaries and articles, some of which are explored here, discuss the contradictions that are inherent in punk culture and among its participants. Authenticity in punk is a shifting landscape, which requires the constant reassessment by musicians to establish their credentials within the punk community.

In answering the question, "How can you be punk if you surrender your individuality for a collective identity?," the answer offered by my interlocutors would suggest that the scene's support amplifies the individual by allowing more opportunities to collaborate and express oneself. In speaking about this debate, the word "community" was frequently used during my fieldwork and has been used by punk musicians, particularly those who participate in a DIY aesthetic, in discussing their respective scenes. When asked about a definition of community, my interlocutors offered different perspectives, but they all conveyed a similar message. It was a message perhaps best articulated by Deborah Tamayo from the band Thyroids in a personal correspondence through a social media website, "To me, community is the lifeblood of a scene. Without the collaborations, integration of different people, lifestyles and the basic love of music, we wouldn't be thriving the way we are. Sharing the magic of making music and having a sense of camaraderie and a place to belong is essential." Deborah's quote highlights the emphasis on personal relationships and the sense of "home" in the DIY community. As evidenced in Tamayo's notes, it is the community that empowers the self and makes the scene possible.

As I've discussed, a core principle of DIY is the building of community which is the primary theme of the 2009 documentary *Between Community and Resistance,* which explored the formative Long Island DIY scene at the turn of the twenty-first century. In this film, members of the scene would organize events beyond music performances such as a weekly kickball game that they ran out of a local strip-mall parking lot (Carroll and Holtzman 2009). Their motivations for the weekly game was to give youth an opportunity to meet and build community and provide an alternative to a consumerist culture through an event that didn't

require monetary investment or charged competition. Trapped in a suburban setting where, "people feel the only way they can contribute is by buying things," punks here perceived their scene as offering a template for reassessing the way people perceive their contributions to the larger society (Carroll and Holtzman 2009). Noted in this documentary, punk for these Long Island participants was an ideology that afforded a way of "transcending" societal norms, which they perceived as having been forced upon them. As in the United Kingdom of the late 1970s, the Long Island scene attempted to push back against the commercialization of music and the mainstream music industry in the early 2000s. Drawing from the aforementioned British scene, the Long Island punks used punk as a means to criticize hegemonic structures they perceived as unjust.

Additionally, in the film *Between Resistance and Community*, members of the Long Island scene assert in the film that DIY punk is actually about "Doing It Together." In a 2014 documentary about DIY punk, *Trying It at Home,* Pat "The Bunny" Schneeweis, a formative DIY punk musician, reinforces this sentiment adding that everyone in these various scenes relies on each other to create and release their music and asserting that the "Y" in DIY represents a collective self as opposed to the singular (Kerley 2014). Today, the importance of community has been a primary focus of the musicians I have spoken with who feel a sense of responsibility to giving back to a scene that has supported and inspired them. For example, Thyroids spoke about the "responsibility" they felt to attend shows of their fellow local bands and to support them in any way they were able. As they told me in our second interview, Thyroids has even begun assembling their own audio engineering equipment to record their music as well as

offering other local bands an opportunity to record their own music[8]. During my interview with Thin Skin, they also credited the Denton music scene with nurturing them and encouraging them to make music despite their lack of training on their individual instruments[9]. For both of these bands, and every group I spoke with, the people around them served as essential resources. Similar to the British scene of the 1970s or the Long Island scene of the early 2000s, contemporary punk musicians draw on the core belief of punk that offers its members a sense of inclusion and affirmation, of surrendering to something larger than yourself.

Since its early days, punk has prided itself on what it is able to build separate from what they see as a society that cheapens existence by monetizing experiences. Early punk pioneers like Black Flag, Youth Brigade, and Minor Threat claimed authenticity through releasing their music through independent labels. Even bands in the early British punk scene applied a DIY ethic by sheer necessity due to the banning of punk music by the larger British culture (Savage 2001). By doing this, bands positioned themselves outside the realm of the mainstream music industry and not beholden to the capitalist ideology that it represented. For all of these groups, DIY culture allowed them artistic freedom to release their music and offered them a platform to reach larger audiences.

For DIY musicians, the music industry acted as a gatekeeper for who was allowed to have a voice and how it would be expressed. Through the championing of amateurism, the perception of a talent threshold required to participate was debunked and more individuals were brought into the fold. The celebrated amateurism has contributed to a punk aesthetic that

[8] Interview with Thyroids, in Dallas, March 26, 2016
[9] Interview with Thin Skin, in Denton, March 4, 2016

has, and continues to, reinforce the connections these people feel to each other through embracing their flaws. Dakota Floyd, of contemporary DIY punk band The Wild, said of the music, “it just feels honest about like wavering off-key vocals and guitars and instruments that are just out of tune… It just feels kind of like home. Because it’s not perfect but it’s honest” (Kerley 2014). Here, a quintessential punk aesthetic that values amateurism, which I delve into later in this chapter, connects that sound to a type of “honest” expression. To be flawed, or to be raw, is equated to being unmediated, which in the DIY scene is of paramount importance where being unmediated serves as an index that the music is accessible to the audience and not overly virtuosic or cleaned up. During my interviews, when asked to define punk Ansley Dougherty responded, “Punk is made by hand.[10]” This quote, while concise, addresses one of the most prevalent ways in which authenticity has been and continues to be assessed by its participants. For these individuals, punk is the conduit through which music can be made to better reflect the human experience. It grants to its participants the ability to be unapologetically crass, messy, and amateur.

With advances in technology evolving since punk’s inception, punk participants have been faced with unique opportunities and challenges that were not experienced by early punk pioneers. For early scenes in the United Kingdom and United States, magazines published and distributed by fans became the medium through which bands could network and have their music heard by a larger audience. Mailing lists, posting flyers around town, and copying and shipping cassettes were all staples of local scenes that have been retooled by contemporary musicians with the help of more advanced technology. One fundamental way in which

[10] Interview with Brandon Lotspeich and Ansley Dougherty, Fort Worth, September 15, 2015

technology has impacted the DIY scene has been the platform offered by the internet. For example, house venue operators in Denton created a group for themselves on the social media website Facebook in an effort to coordinate with, and promote each other's, shows. The house venues in Denton are not-for-profit, which allows a collaborative approach that is embraced by these venue operators.

However, the initial attempts at creating this type of group were unsuccessful as detailed in my interview with several Denton house venue operators: Dylan Tarver of Fannin House Camille Aguirre of Fannin House, Miles Mueller of unaffiliated, Jesse Killebrew of Fannin House, Maritza Vega of Casa de Monstros, Matt Snoddy of House of God, and Masen Yaro of The Groove Yard. Initially, they had allowed people to join the online group who were only participants and did not operate a house venue. With these new members joining the group, the group mutated from its original intent, to coordinate events to avoid double booking, into a type of forum for anyone to voice their opinion. Ultimately, people who were not members of the scene, or who were fringe members, submitted posts that are considered taboo in the DIY punk scene. For example, the posting of a house venue's address publicly, without the home owner's permission, is perceived as major violation of the DIY scene's ethics. The final event that led to these venue operators shutting down the general page. and creating a private page that only they had access to, was the posting of a house venue's address on the page to a show that was meant to support the LGBTQ community. A number of individuals who did not adhere to the house rules attended the event, and who I was told created an atmosphere that venue

owners found problematic, which led to the call for the group page to be shuttered[11]. Technology has offered these venue operators a helpful resource to better organize, but with greater visibility participants have greater challenges in maintaining control over accessibility.

As evidenced by the incident above, advances in technology can present both challenges and opportunities unique to contemporary punk musicians. Many have lamented the ability of technology to downplay human characteristics of music. For example, Jeff Rosenstock of DIY band Bomb the Music Industry remarked, “It’s also harder because production sucks so much now. Like, bands make records where everything’s autotuned and it sounds like this big computerized racket that’s designed to manipulate you emotionally” (Thompson 2015). Rosenstock, who incorporates electronic instruments into his music, which he describes as “laptop punk,” laments the increased presence of technology and how he perceives it as removing agency from human beings, or rather a variant of the ‘we connect with the technology as opposed to the people.’ This sentiment was further reflected in my own interviews where Same Brain expressed their preference for cassettes and vinyl, over digital formats such as mp3, because of a perceived humanity in the sound of these older mediums. They are often described as “warmer” or having a “natural distortion.[12]” As I will explore further in the next section, contemporary punk’s focus often involves a reclamation of agency from technology in music making in addition to the aforementioned subversion of social norms and the music industry.

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[11] Interview with Dylan Tarver, Camille Aguirre, Miles Mueller, Jesse Killebrew, Maritza Vega, Matt Snoddy, and Masen Yaro, Denton, July 3, 2017

[12] Interview with Same Brain, Fort Worth, July 3, 2016

2.2 Cassettes: Contemporary Perceptions on an Antiquated Technology

To illustrate an example of how contemporary punk musicians have attempted to connect to punk's past, I want to briefly explore the renewed interest in cassette tapes. The cassette tape's impact on the music industry in the 1970s and 1980s was a catalyst for many punk groups who were able to use the medium to share music in a more cost-effective way (Novak 2011, 623-624). For example, Daniel Johnston, a lo-fi/folk musician from Austin, Texas, increased his profile around Austin in the 1980s through his incessant distribution of personalized tapes that he handed out around the city. He eventually achieved a type of cult-following around the United States that continues today (Feuerzeig 2005). Additionally, Thurston Moore, from the post-punk band Sonic Youth, used the new medium in the 1980s to collect tapes from local bands on tour and connect with other musicians (Moore 2004, 12). Moreover, the ability to create mixtapes, where the listener is able to combine tracks from different albums onto a single tape, encouraged them to assume a more active role in how they experience music. Suddenly one had the ability to make creative choices in the order and character of a record.

Today, contemporary punk musicians have begun to release their music on cassette tapes in large part due to the connotations attached to the medium. The indexical associations attached to the cassette, which champion personal agency for the listener and the democratization of music, function to imbue these bands with an authenticity derived from their knowledge and appreciation of punk's past. For these participants, cassettes connect them to a past, which for them is almost entirely imagined, that relied largely on face-to-face interaction and the building of personal relationships. Cassettes here are employed to combat

an increasingly digitized world where face-to-face interaction is not necessary for listeners to be exposed to bands. The cassette keeps the music in the physical world and reminds participants of punk's beginnings, although bands typically also offer their releases for digital download. However, the global underground music scene has found utility in cassette tapes beyond just connecting with an imagined past. They are used to "to remain independent in a participatory online context, musical undergrounds must generate similar limits on circulation, which will allow listeners to recognize specific transformations of content" (Novak 2011, 626). The inefficiency of the cassette tape, as compared to the modern digital formats of music, is the very thing that allows underground music cultures to retain proprietary control over their music. In this sense, the antiquated technology of the cassette tape offers it a modern use. For punk musicians, the use of technology remains a negotiation where participants must assess what aspects of technological advancement reinforce authentic punk music making and which contradict it.

The preference for tapes by these musicians is also due to the unique sound quality these tapes lend to the aesthetic of the music. David Novak explored the significance of tapes and their sonic character in his article (2011) "The Sublime Frequencies of New Old Media." He writes, "Unlike a digital file, an analog music recording is inherently limited by the transience and noise that accrues in its reproduction. As they are copied and redistributed, physical media are inevitably changed by their handlers; their content bears the marks of their circulation" (626). Unlike digital formats that create clearer recordings that maintain their quality, cassette tapes are changed by their listeners. The fuzz of the cassette tape, the "warm" sound, becomes indexical of the shared experience of that recording through the tape's reproduction. The

listener doesn't hear a low-quality recording, but rather they hear all of the people with whom they share this recording. After I purchased a cassette tape from a local DIY band at a show, the musician in the group called out to me, "wear that tape out." Similar to the human experience, the cassette tape ultimately ages and expires. The finiteness of cassette tapes further attaches an index of humanity to their sound making it "warmer."

During interviews, punk musicians particularly expressed their appreciation for cassette tapes as opposed to the more contemporary formats of mp3 or wav files due to the sonic effects present in the playing of a cassette tape. In our second interview, Mark Bitner of Thyroids spoke of his preference for tape saying, "it sounds more in the moment… The way it rattles, the actual vibrations of the tape itself, make it sound like a live performance.[13]" The preceding quote showcases the benefits that these musicians perceive in having a tangible physical copy of the music and how that tangibility contributes to the pursuit of a sense of liveness by punk participants. My interviewees went on to describe the sound of cassettes as warmer or more human. Here, there is an appreciation for the aesthetic qualities, like the rattling of the tape, that speaks to a celebration of DIY punk's characteristic lo-fi aesthetic that was initially borne out of attempts to alienate the genre as well as just a lack of access to higher quality recording equipment (Rodel 2004, 182). Contemporary musicians, growing up hearing this cassette aesthetic, have been conditioned to appreciate it as desirable. Cassette tapes, while just one example, illustrate the tendon linking punk's past and present. The indexical associations attached to cassette tapes based on its historical significance as well as its sought-

[13] Interview with Mark Bitner, Dallas, March 26, 2016

after sonic qualities has impacted the way contemporary punk musicians write, perform, and listen to music.

2.3. Being Punk

In its various subgenres, punk, for its participants, invokes a way of doing things. For these participants, to "be punk" is determined by the way in which one goes about doing something, as opposed to a specific sound or style. Mike Watt, bass player for The Minutemen, a formative 1980s punk band from California, defined punk as, "something you have to do to know it, and the only ones who understand it are the ones who did. Punk was more than just starting a band, it was about starting a label, it was about touring, it was about taking control" (Arnold 1993, 40). Watt's quote illustrates the perception of punk as something beyond a subculture or genre of music, but rather a life philosophy that empowers people to be self-reliant. Moreover, Watt's quote champions the local and encourages the participation of amateurs. Additionally, his emphasis on touring illustrates the importance that punk participants place on establishing personal connections to collaborate, distribute, and disseminate DIY music. For these participants, to be authentically punk involves reclamation of agency and the encouragement of others to participate.

This perception of punk as a way of doing things is a result of what Ryan Moore calls "the culture of authenticity" which developed during the 1970s and 1980s punk scenes (Moore 2004, 307-308). With the perception that punk had been coopted after its initial commercial success, participants attempted to "go underground" in an attempt to reclaim control over the development of punk (ibid, 307). This became the genesis for much of the DIY ethic with numerous fanzines and record labels developed to release and support music while eliminating

the dependence on major labels and the perceived commodification of music. These DIY networks have been amplified with technological innovations. Presently, the internet has offered a larger platform to DIY musicians to reach larger audiences and connect with other groups. The internet, in particular, has been a useful tool for DIY participants to be exposed to different bands from outside their own city and engage with other individuals. Websites like DODIY.org offer musicians and participant's information about local shows and allow bands to book tours at DIY spaces across the country. While not face-to-face, DODIY.org helps foster the personal relationships that are at the core of punk philosophy. This DIY ethic is perhaps best described by Will Rutherford of Penguin Suit Records who said of his relationship to the bands he works with, "if I can't have a handshake deal and make it stick, they're not actually my friend and I'd rather not release it" (Dunn 2012, 226). Punk music relies on these types of personal negotiations and local networks. More importantly, the notions of authenticity that promote these networks help participants retain proprietary control and encourage musicians and fans to adhere to punk values.

2.4. Towards a Definition of Authenticity

Authenticity remains a contentious concept in both scholarly and popular discourse on popular music. Max Paddison's oft-cited definition of authenticity defines it as, "the 'real thing,' the original, the unique, as opposed to the illusory, the imitation, the reproduction, the fake, the counterfeit, or the mass produced" (2004, 201). Paddison's definition relies on a comparison between what is punk and what is not, or rather that the authentic relies on the inauthentic in order to define it. This definition is particularly poignant in punk culture, which has placed itself in opposition to the mainstream (inauthentic). Hans Weisethaunet in his

article, “Authenticity Revisited: The Rock Critic and the Changing Real” examined how journalists in popular music attributed authenticity to musicians. He compiled a list of differing ideas on authenticity, which included the perception of authenticity as negation (Weisethaunet 2007). “This variant of authenticity is the idea of artistic independence as ‘refusal’ or ‘purity.’ It defines itself against that which it thinks it is not” (ibid, 472). Again, Weisethaunet’s description of authenticity as negation captures the essence of counterculture, which stands in opposition to the dominant group. Authenticity in this context is determined chiefly by comparison, as it relies on its definition from the inauthentic.

Adam Arola further explored the construction of the authentic as an opposition in his article (2007), “The Tyranny of Authenticity.” Arola claims, “the entire domain of punk rock culture attempts to understand itself through this model of being more authentic, more autonomous, more punk. In doing so, it replicates the structure that it is attempting to break off from. Why? Because its rebellion takes the form of pure reaction” (Arola 2007, 299). Arola’s quote highlights the cognitive dissonance of authenticity in punk culture, a topic that receives attention from the self-parodying culture of punk. While punks claim to subvert social norms, their resistance relies on the same paradigm constructed by the mainstream culture that they resist.

Max Paddison’s definition of authenticity, and indeed the connotations associated with the colloquial use of the word, uncovers a number of issues. Paddison’s evoking of “the real thing” as being authentic in comparison to “the fake” or “mass-produced” illustrates the perception of authenticity as a genuine expression of the individual. The idea of the genuine is further explored by Allan Moore in his article (2002), “Authenticity as Authentication,” where

he presents the idea of authenticity as expression (Moore, 214). “[Authenticity as expression] arises when an originator (composer, performer) succeeds in conveying the impression that his/her utterance is one of integrity, that it represents an attempt to communicate in an unmediated form with an audience” (ibid). Here, authenticity is tied to the performer’s ability to connect with audience members and make performances, as Paddison described, a “unique” and seemingly unmediated experience. Moore’s authenticity as expression provides a useful model for examining the DIY punk scene, which emphasizes face-to-face interaction and connections between audience and musician. This sense of the unmediated and genuine becomes problematic in that the very nature of performance would seem to imply that one is altering their behavior (Weisenhaunet 2010). This is manifested in the lyrics of DIY punk group Ramshackle Glory’s song “Punk is the worst form of music, except for all the others” in which they assert: “Every song is a lie as soon as it’s played twice.” The cognitive dissonance of authenticity and self-deprecation in punk culture begins to emerge, as the very performance of the music is cast as inauthentic.

In a recent example of punk’s grappling with authenticity, Joe Corre, son of Sex Pistols’ manager Malcolm McLaren, recently burned a large collection of his father’s punk artifacts stating, “[Punk] was never meant to be about nostalgia” (Sawer 2016). For Corre, idolizing individual musicians of punk’s past contradicts the participatory nature of punk culture that encourages a blurring of the distinction between musician and audience and is critical of the “rock star mentality.” This treatment of punk’s history problematizes the construction of a genealogy of punk practice, but contemporary punk musicians still draw influence and often cite punk’s history in relation to their own conceptions of authenticity. While Corre condemns

an idolization of punk's past, he invokes punk's history to do so. Corre's sentiment reflects the problematic character of punk authenticity and the complicated relationship that punk culture has with its now idolized past.

2.5. Authenticity: A DIY Endeavor

Punk fanzines have been formative in the development of punk-culture in that they allowed for more effective communication between members and between scenes. Moreover, fanzines allowed members of punk scenes to take control of the narrative of punk from the mainstream music industry, "saying whatever's on your mind, unbeholden to corporate sponsors, puritan censors, or professional standards of argument and design, being yourself and expressing your real thoughts and real feelings-these are what zinesters consider authentic" (Duncombe 2008, 38). This quote illustrates the character of these fanzines where often coherent writing, or even legible print, and the quality of information are not as important as being oneself. For these participants, the hastily Xeroxed or slapped-together aesthetic common of many fanzines conveys the spontaneity and sincerity that grants a publication its authenticity. In contrast, virtuosity in performance, glossy images and refined writing suggest a filtering of human expression, a truly inauthentic endeavor.

To illustrate the emphasis on participation and the DIY ethic in punk culture, I want to briefly discuss a formative artifact from punk's history. The image in punk fanzine Sideburns no. 1[14] diagrams three chords crudely translated into guitar tablature and implores its readers to "form a band" (Moon 1977). This iconic page perpetuates a central message of punk culture;

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[14] Moon, Tony. 1977. "In the Stranglers Grip." *Sideburns*, January.

the notion that everyone should participate in music making. Aesthetic choices in this publication draw on notions of authenticity, and champion the perspective of the amateur, but the image's chief function is to provide the reader with the necessary musicianship to participate in punk culture. While emphasizing the "democratizing" of music making, or rather publishing in this case, it is important to note that punk fanzines were circulated outside of the mainstream. In this sense, the image speaks to an exclusivity, and proprietary control, exercised by punk participants.

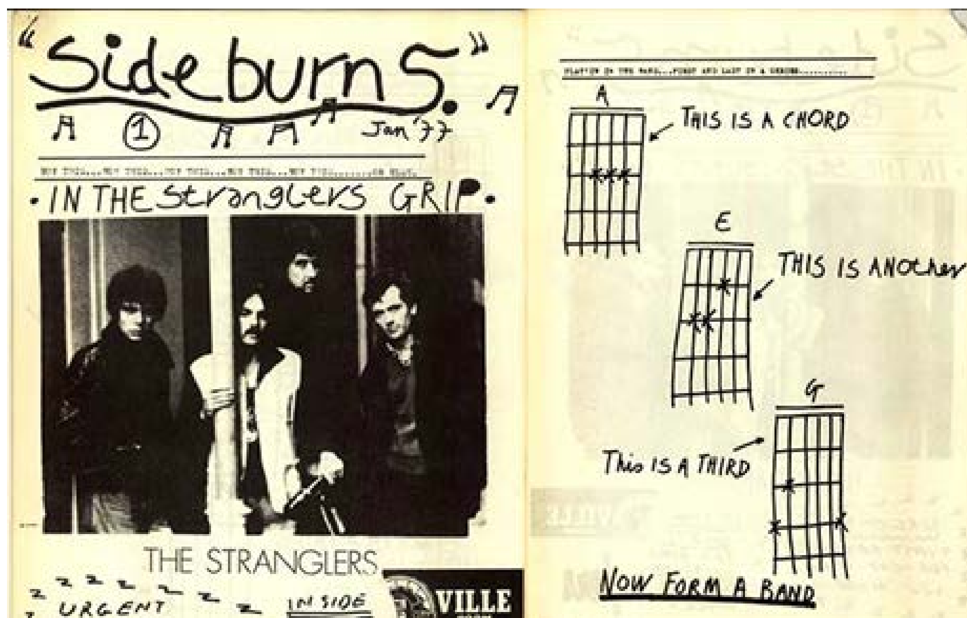

Figure 2.1: *Sideburns* Fanzine no.1 [15]

A cursory glance at the image evokes a sense of amateurism. The title of the publication is crooked and the title page is decorated with a variety of hand drawn ornaments. The second page diagrams three chords in guitar tablature and states simply, "This is a chord, this is another, this is a third, now form a band." The chords (A,E,G) illustrated in their major form

[15] Moon, Tony. 1977. "In the Stranglers Grip." *Sideburns*, January.

differs from the I-IV-V progression and power chords, which are only composed of a P5 interval, that form the bedrock of the punk aesthetic. However, the accuracy of the information is not as important as the intent behind it. Regardless of the chord progression being inaccurate, this excerpt from *Sideburns* has become iconic because it so fully captured the distillation of music by punk musicians into just three chords.

2.6. Unity in the Inauthentic

As evidenced in Matt Scifres' quote that begins this chapter, "authenticity is everything," the quest for the authentic has a significant impact on the behavior of punk participants. However, in my own conversations during fieldwork, defining the authentic was characterized as a futile and counterproductive pursuit. In one conversation with members of Not Half Bad, they characterized internal discourse on authenticity within punk scenes as a "circle jerk.[16]" In other words, they believe that discussions of what is "authentic" are self-serving diatribes that only serve to trivialize the role and character of other participants. In another conversation, venue operator Masen Yaro remarked, "The moment you try to say that this way is better, that's what loses the whole ideal of punk.[17]" Similar to Arola's critique of how authenticity is constructed, both Not Half Bad and Yaro perceived these claims of authenticity as attempts to elevate oneself above others within a scene, which contradicts the egalitarian nature of punk culture that encourage participation and decry hierarchies. For Not Half Bad and other members of the scene, the mere construction of one's authenticity, which relies on

[16] Interview with Matt Scifres and Alex Weymier, Denton, October 22, 2015
[17] Interview with Masen Yaro, Denton, July 3, 2017

comparison, is inauthentic, as it serves to exclude and place participants in opposition to each other.

Not Half Bad's characterization of punk discourse on authenticity contradicts their initial claim of the central role of authenticity in punk culture. This cognitive dissonance is a defining part of the punk character. This debate is articulated in the final verse of formative DIY punk group from Long Island, Bomb the Music Industry's (BTMI), song "Side Projects are Never Successful":

> And when I finally got to work today
> I ate my Subway sandwich
> And I drank my Coca-Cola Classic
> And then I ate my Sunchips
> And I thought about the weekend
> When I'd fill up my Ford van
> With Mobil brand gas
> And drive to the Clear Channel venue
> And I'd drink myself a Budweiser
> And play my Fender guitar
> Through my Fender amplifier
> And tell the kids with a straight face
> Through a Shure microphone
> And JBL speakers that corporate rock is for suckers

For DIY bands reconciling their political beliefs and the ideology of punk with their dependence on mainstream culture is a constant negotiation that plays out in both participant's discourse and the text of the music. The acknowledgment that, in a sense, we are all inauthentic reframes the conceptions of what it means to be authentic.

The acceptance of failed authenticity speaks to principles of practice theory, where the individual shares agency with the structure (society). The self-awareness illustrated by DIY punk musicians acknowledges the role that society has in the construction of the individual. Again, the act of resisting the hegemonic structures places them squarely in the system that they rebel

against. Adam Arola posits that the acknowledgment of one's role in the system and failure to be fully authentic has the potential to grant the musicians more power in enacting the change that they seek, as it is through this transparency that musicians can effectively illustrate flaws in a given pattern of social life (Arola 2007, 302). If authenticity, as Max Paddison defined, is about "the real," then a realistic examination of one's role in society would be an authentic expression.

Not Half Bad's single "Punk Rock is a Full-Time Job" offers that regardless of one's actions we are all ultimately inauthentic, "I'll be the first to admit, it's fuck the world or pay the rent. And I wish that I could say, I lived my life like Youth Brigade[18], but when the lights come up, you say I'm just a fake." Here, the introductory quote "authenticity is everything" comes into clearer focus. The acknowledgment of nobody being capable of being truly authentic becomes a galvanizing force that gives the music and the scene its power to bring people together through the acknowledgment of their own inauthenticity. Authenticity then is a set of ideals and characteristics that are championed within the DIY punk scene, but with the expectation that all participants will ultimately fail in the pursuit of the authentic. It acknowledges that, while the individual has agency, she/he is ultimately a participant in the larger society.

2.7. Understanding the Authentic

In this chapter, I have explored how authenticity is defined. I have discussed what qualities are championed as authentic in punk culture and briefly examined how notions of authenticity have developed in DIY punk music. I have explored how my interlocutors discuss

[18] Youth Brigade is a Los Angeles punk band formed in 1980 that emphasized an independent/DIY ethic.

authenticity and how they enact it in their behavior. While detailing the history of punk culture is beyond the scope of this thesis, a historical perspective on punk offers insight into how and why notions of authenticity have been so central to the culture's ideology. For punks, the appropriation of their message, style, and music has inspired them to create their own infrastructure for performing, recording, and promoting DIY music. Notions of authenticity discourage hierarchies and encourage all listeners to participate and create. They protect punk culture from appropriation by interlopers and insist upon musicians to utilize the DIY ethic to remain "authentic."

However, punk authenticity has proven to be hard to adhere to. Punk musicians declare their own failure to live up to the tenets of the DIY ethic in both their music and their discourse. But in that failure punk participants declare their shared humanity and are brought closer together through their own inauthenticity. As Matt Scifres asserted, "Authenticity is everything." It is the ideal that they aspire to as well as the shortcoming that galvanizes the participants in their shared struggle. Ultimately, notions of authenticity encourage participants to adhere to the namesake of DIY punk culture, which exclaims, "Do it yourself!"

CHAPTER 3

CRAFTING A SCENE: THE IMPORTANCE AND SONIC EXPERIENCE OF HOUSE SHOWS

While doing my fieldwork, I often found myself in a stranger's kitchen making round after round of introductions to the people flooding into the home to attend the night's performance. We would stand in the crowded kitchen conversing while another attendee would remove their fresh six-pack of a local craft beer to place in the communal fridge. Sounds would begin to emanate from the front room as the band finished their setup and we would all begin to stream into the space. Although a stranger, I was struck by the impact these conversations with attendees had on my own experience of the show. In a foreign space surrounded by individuals I had never met, I suddenly felt a kinship to the people I stood shoulder-to-shoulder with. When we bumped into each other during the performance what typically would be met with an apology was celebrated with a smile and an embrace. Dylan Tarver commented to me on the significance of live performances in DIY punk, "You sing those songs with all your heart in your car and that's enough… but then you go to the concert and you realize all these other people are singing those songs and feeling that same way.[19]" Live performances are where participants, who have made profound personal connections to the music, step out of their individualized experience and into the collective. In this chapter, I delve into the DFW scene and explore the importance of performance spaces to notions of authenticity within the DFW DIY punk scene.

In this chapter which centers on performance venues for DIY punk music, I pay particular attention to the house shows that have been prevalent within the DIY punk scene for

[19] Interview with Dylan Tarver, Denton, July 3, 2017

decades. As I will discuss, house shows have been crucial to the development of DIY punk in that they allowed participants more control over their scene. Because these are people's homes and not bars or clubs, which typically charge a fee for entry, house shows offered bands larger audiences and allowed house venue operators the freedom to book bands in their scene without worrying about the profits generated by the show. The prevalence of house venues in the national DIY scene has allowed DIY punk to grow and develop largely without meddling from the mainstream. These house venues continue to be an enduring legacy linking punk's past with punk's present. In DIY punk, everything from how the venue is chosen to the structuring of the space is informed by the attempted adherence to authentic punk music making.

3.1. A Home (Not a Performance)

During my fieldwork, I interviewed several house show operators from various Denton house venues who routinely host DIY punk shows. I was curious as to what made them comfortable opening their home, as most lived in the houses where they organized performances, to complete strangers and how they perceived the significance of what they were doing. A recurring theme in their answers involved some variation on allowing freedom for individual expression by encouraging people to participate in the scene in some way and, as discussed in the previous chapter, foster a different way for people to interact that is not centered on monetary gain. Dylan Tarver's assertion that, "Punk rock is supposed to bring you out of apathy,[20]" encapsulates their perceived role in encouraging expression and participation from others. As I will discuss in this chapter, house shows are meant to counter the typical

[20] Interview with Dylan Tarver, Denton, July 3, 2017

metrics of success used by bars or clubs that solely value the amount of money the band generates for them.

A powerful way in which house venues have contrasted the experience of their shows with that of bars or clubs can be found in the character of the space. In particular, the venue operators cited the idea of bringing music to the "home" as a motivating factor with Dylan Tarver of Fannin House commenting on the character of the space, "I want it to feel like a house… not a performance.[21]" This particular venue operator also encouraged a local barista to come to performances and brew coffee for the attendees, with the barista only accepting donations.[22] My interlocutor believed that offering participants the chance to drink coffee with other attendees in the kitchen further contributed to making people feel as if they were at home. Venue operators have also encouraged local artists to photograph shows, as well as one local artist who would draw portraits of the attendees. All of these activities contribute to a unique show experience, but their larger importance is their encouragement of individual expression. At these performances, venue operators encourage attendees to contribute their creative talents and help build the scene.

During the interview which took place at Denton's Fannin House, I noticed several of the decorations hung around the room of the performance space. There were pictures of Hindu deities on the wall, a broken crash cymbal which had been broken during a performance there and donated by the band, several pictures of Kurt Cobain and other punk musicians, as well as numerous other items from signs displaying "hippie" sayings to a fake shark that was hung on

[21] ibid
[22] Interview with Camille Aguirre and Dylan Tarver, Denton, July 3, 2017

the wall. When I inquired into the significance of these pieces, all of the owners were in agreement that the decorations in their house were meant to be reflections of them. For these owners, by displaying different things they believe represented them or their aesthetic taste, they were encouraging other attendees to be comfortable with expressing themselves[23]. Here, a connection between the attendee and the owner is created immediately upon entering the space and strangers can be made familiar through their occupying of another's home.

3.2. House Shows

House venues have allowed participants to reclaim agency in the booking, arranging, and character of the performance venues. In the DFW scene, and particularly in Denton, house shows have historically made a large contribution to the character of the local music scene and to the culture of the larger city. *Don't Forget to Donate*, a short film made by Denton punk musicians in the 1990s explored the various house venues in the city at that time and included cameos of local bands and the hi-jinx of the participants. *Don't Forget to Donate* is a snapshot of the Denton punk scene during a tumultuous time period for punk culture. Releasing the film on social media app Vimeo in 2011, Alex Campos retroactively describes the film:

> Ahhhh the late 90's. A time before Cellphones, Friendster, and did you see the end of Seinfeld!? Meh. The post grunge era filled the airwaves with a cornucopia of bubblegum Disney pop princesses and mediocre fucktards. Even then we were lamenting that MTV never played music videos. The "M" stands for music dammit! 1992 may have been the year that punk broke but the late 90's were the years music ate its own face off.
> This short doc chronicles what happens in a city of 60,000 when kids get together and rock your fuckin balls off for no other reason than to cause testicular spontaneous combustion. Do you know how to play? ...Fuck it. Do you have a place to play? ... Well then come over to my house. Wanna play in somebody's living room for gas money? ... Well then it's on! Great bands, shit bands, touring bands, bands that still play to this day. Denton in the late 90's was all about playing music with nowhere to play. So out of the ooze of Sublime singles and Y2K Preparations came the insanity. Telephone book paper

[23] Interview with Dylan Tarver, Denton, July 3, 2017

> fights, 40 oz. parties, Jeff Silly running around naked, getting busted for noise complaints, holding benefit shows to pay off said noise complaint ticket. Back when the "door money" consisted of a tattooed girl with a nose ring (which was a little more rare in those days) with a coffee can asking for donations. This is Denton in the late 90's.

Campos' description, while tinged with nostalgia, illustrates several of the authentic themes discussed in the previous chapter. The amateurism, lack of formality, and the grassroots nature of the scene all serve as a subversion to "MTV" and the mainstream music industry and encourages people to participate. *Don't Forget to Donate* highlights the contributions of house shows to the character of the Denton music scene, which carve out a space in the city that allows the youth a platform to express themselves.

In the DFW scene, and particularly in Denton, house venues continue to be particularly poignant to musicians who find themselves with fewer venues to perform at due to the changing demographics of the DFW metroplex caused by gentrification. Particularly in Denton, the past two years have witnessed the shuttering of three iconic Denton music venues (Rubber Gloves Rehearsal Studios, J&J's Pizza, and Hailey's) that have offered a reliable performance space for DFW punk musicians for decades. In response to these venue closings, local DFW venue operator Chris Cotter, operator of Fort Worth DIY venue 1919 Hemphill, hosted a forum in Denton for members of the scene to discuss potential options for expanding DIY punk performance spaces within the city of Denton and to offer musicians reliable places to perform beyond house shows. The meeting reflected a number of the reservations and suspicions that are held by members of the Denton scene (Gage 2016). Participants were particularly suspicious of outside investors funding potential venues in Denton and further gentrifying the town.

The Denton forum and the concerns voiced by the attendees of the forum illustrate why house shows have become so central to DIY punk and championed as the authentic performance space for DIY punk rock. This sentiment was expressed by a formative local Denton punk musician who in a Facebook post last year wrote, "House shows are the last bastion of artistic freedom in our music scene, since neither the performers nor the venue are motivated by profit. I hope we get more of them and that the moneymen who've bought everyone else in town never find a way to control them." This participant's quote is indicative of the larger perspective among DFW punk musicians who attempt to reconcile central tenets of punk culture with the fiscal logistics of a local music scene. For this participant, house shows represent the ideal solution that allows participants to retain what they perceive to be authentic punk practices of music making and eliminate outside actors from profiting off of the work and music of the DFW scene.

In addition to the forum, local musicians and artists have staged their own festivals run through local house venues. These festivals shared the same aim as Cotter in that they attempted to offer musicians and fans access to a place where they could perform. Events like the Free Underage Cool Kids Festival, or F.U.C.K. Fest, invited bands from across DFW to perform over a weekend at a local house in Denton. The event was designed to allow participants, particularly those under the age of twenty-one, to see bands that traditionally played twenty-one and up venues. Additionally, in January owners of several Denton house venues united to stage a weekend-long festival, Band Together Denton, celebrating the growing house show culture in the community and further providing musicians an opportunity to perform in the city. The shuttering of iconic Denton venues, and the resident's suspicions

towards gentrification, has attached an added significance to the house venues operating in Denton. As evidenced in the previously discussed Facebook post, they are often perceived to be the representation of what the Denton music scene should be.

3.3 The Significance of Space: A Perspective on the House Show

Andrew Eisenberg in his article (2015), "Islam, Sound and Space: Acoustemology and Muslim Citizenship on the Kenyan Coast" in Georgina Born's book *Music, Sound, and Space* explores how the identity of a space is constructed through its soundscape. In the book, Eisenberg discusses how the broadcast of a local mosque's *adhān* transforms the character of the Old Town neighborhood in Mombasa, Kenya. The broadcast of the *adhān* becomes a call and response type event that allows residents to participate in a further assertion of the space's Islamic identity through actions such as prayer (Eisenberg 2010, 191). Eisenberg details how the soundscape of this neighborhood, which asserts its identity as an Islamic space, stands in contrast to the liberal-democratic sensibilities of the surrounding Kenyan population. In their own book on Swahili culture, Mazrui and Shariff discuss the role of the soundscape in articulating Muslim experience in Mombasa, "Their neighborhood and its surroundings provide them with shared sensory experiences while reaffirming 'the bitter reality of their political marginalization in contemporary Kenya" (Mazrui and Shariff 1994, 155). Eisenberg details one particular example where an imam has a physical altercation with a non-Muslim resident who complained about the volume of the *adhān.* For the imam and Kenya's Muslims, the "public space" was understood as adhering to the cultural norms of Islam, whereas for the other actor it was perceived as neutral adhering to the cultural norms of the larger city. Eisenberg's case

study of Mombasa, Kenya demonstrates the influence of sound in establishing the character of a space and carving out a sense of place for a specific group.

Similar to Eisenberg's discussion, house show's contributions to the soundscape of Denton and the DFW metroplex carve out a space for DIY punk participants. In a city that falls increasingly silent, the house show venues offer a sense of place to members of the scene. Here, the setting of the house show comes to represent more than just reclamation of agency from the music industry, they reflect the impact of gentrification on the soundscape of the city. The wobbling cymbals and the screech of audio feedback have migrated from the heavily trafficked commercial centers to the relatively quiet residential neighborhoods. During my fieldwork as I drove through different Denton neighborhoods on Friday nights, I would hear a show a street away and walk over to investigate. Similar to the *adhān,* the sounds of the music serve as a call to those nearby to gather into the collective and participate in the performance. The sounds transform the character of the space and the behavioral norms associated with a home in a residential neighborhood. People swarm in and out of the house without knocking, the backyard or living room is transformed by dancing bodies, and the front yard becomes a hangout for locals and show attendees

The competing perceptions of the public/private discussed in Eisenberg's example of a local mosque also occur in the DFW DIY punk scene. Numerous performances, such as the aforementioned F.U.C.K. Festival, are hindered by neighbors filing noise complaints with the local police to stop performances. Increasingly, there is a sharp contrast in the perception of the residential space in Denton. For the DIY punk participants, the residential is perceived as a more bohemian communitarian space that is designed to foster connection between

individuals, whereas the neighbors construct the suburb as a distinctly private space adhering to what might be considered more traditional attitudes concerning suburban residential zones. The house show venues of Denton reflect how the larger DIY punk ethic is applied in practice by participants and demonstrates how participants reconcile the philosophy with their surroundings. The soundscapes of the neighborhood are transformed by these house venues that come to illustrate the marginalization of the DIY punk community. The significance of house show venues is found in what they represent to the members of the Denton music scene. In a shifting landscape that attempts to silence, house shows offer participants the chance to sound.

3.4. Participatory Settings

In understanding the importance of house show venues to DIY punk culture, it is important to explore the setting of these venues and how they are constructed to adhere to what the participants perceive as authentic practice. Perhaps the most defining feature of the layout of house show venues is the absence of a stage. The lack of stage provides a unique character to house show performances where the audience and performers come to occupy the same space. This lack of stage reinforces the participatory nature of punk culture where the distinction between audience and performer becomes blurred. This sentiment was echoed during my interview with Denton punk band Thin Skin where Katie Reese remarked, "[Without a stage] you're with them, not performing at them.[24]" Dylan Tarver and Matt Snoddy, operators of house venues in Denton, further elaborated, "[When you go to a show for a major-label band] they are six-feet off the ground and they look like gods to you, and it's held up as this

[24] Interview with Katie Reese, Denton, March 4, 2016

impossibility.[25]" For Thin Skin and these venue operators, the stage represents an attempt to elevate the musicians over the audience in a clear contradiction of the egalitarian values espoused by punk culture. Moreover, it contradicts the belief that anyone can participate by idolizing the musicians performing. By challenging the normative setup of a musical performance, which typically draw distinctions between audience and performer, punk musicians and house show setups encourage the participation of show attendees.

Matt Sakakeeny in his article (2010), "'Under the Bridge': An Orientation to Soundscapes in New Orleans," explores the way in which changes in aural environment impact the way in which people listen. In his fieldwork, Sakakeeny examines the impact the construction of Interstate 10 through downtown New Orleans, and in particular the construction of a bridge through one of the neighborhoods, altered the experience of the funeral processions in the city. For these participants, the bridge was redefined from an intrusion and further marginalization of their neighborhood into the climactic finale of the funeral dirges that have made these New Orleans neighborhoods famous. "The 'bridge' creates intimacy, enclosing parade participants, maximizing a sense of unity, and the concrete makes for spectacular acoustics, amplifying and multiplying participatory sound" (Sakakeeny 2010, 2-3). Sakakeeny's case study illustrates the effect of space, and how listeners re-contextualize the significance of a space to accomplish a certain effect.

Similar to Sakakeeny's ethnography, with the aforementioned closing of venues in Denton, Texas participants have had to negotiate a new environment for their own performances. In this new dynamic, the relatively larger performance space of a venue like

[25] Interview with Dylan Tarver, Denton, July 3, 2017

Rubber Gloves Rehearsal Studios have been replaced with the tiny confines of two-bedroom houses typically designed to house students at the local universities. Participants have used the emphasis on house show venues, and the uniquely intimate experience they offer to DIY punk participants, as a further means to emphasize personal connections and camaraderie at shows and within the scene.

Moreover, house shows encourage a type of communitarian show-going experience. More than at other types of performance spaces, at house show performances strangers would more frequently engage me in conversations. This sharing of a house, an intimate experience itself, cultivates a connection between attendees. Because of the setting, house shows provide amenities that dive bars either discourage or do not offer. For example, the Pink Cactus, a house venue in Denton, TX, has a "Bring Your Own Bottle" (BYOB) policy that encourages participants to bring alcohol and store it in the host's refrigerator. The kitchen becomes the center of activity between sets, as participants pass around alcohol, and converse. The setting of these discursive events, in the kitchen, constructs an atmosphere similar to one's experiencing of their own private living space. The refrigerator in the background, the kitchen table, and the personal effects of the owner provide a stark visual contrast to the settings of shows at concert halls or even bars. The participant is made to feel that they are at home. Moreover, the structure of performances take on an almost ritualistic quality, as the audience gathers in the kitchen for libations and conversation and is brought back to the living room with the sound of screeching feedback announcing the next band is ready to perform. These discursive interludes between bands further foster a familiar atmosphere as people engage each other. The informal greetings, the inside jokes, and mingling foster connections between

attendees and further transform the character of the performance space into a hangout, as opposed to a concert.

Here, the participatory nature of the music, where the listener engages with the sound, extends to how listeners interact with each other. In this sense, it is the house show's informal atmosphere, and the fostering of connections through casual conversation at shows, that provide context for the music. For these participants, the space in which the music happens alters their perception of the performance. House shows bring the audience members together and bring musical performance to one of the most personal spaces, one's home. Through this, typical attitudes of performance space are challenged, as music happens wherever the people are.

3.5. DIY Ideology: Criticisms of DFW Punk

However, house shows also receive criticism within the scene for their perceived failure to incorporate other extra-musical aspects of DIY punk culture. The larger DIY punk ideology extends beyond just the production, performance, and participation in music. DIY punk culture encourages members to participate in activities and events that benefit their cities. For example, participants will often sponsor clothing and food drives to benefit their communities. Culton and Holtzman explored this criticism in the formative Long Island DIY punk scene in the early 2000s. House shows in this scene initially represented "free spaces" to organize protests, share ideas, and perform music that championed activist themes (Culton and Holtzman 2010, 277). As the scene grew, participants began to focus more on their own personal relationships with each other as opposed to political activism. This trend was lamented by factions of the Long Island scene who perceived a lack of attention to social activism as a departure from the

authentic performance of what DIY punk and house shows represent. Culton and Holtzman include the perspective of one DIY participant from this scene, “you can’t just be a fucking beatnik and you know, tap your drum and think that, you’re doing something really good for the world” (Culton and Holtzman 2010, 277). For these participants, the scene and its emphasis on house show performances reflected a larger ideology that should be applied to all facets of life beyond just music performance.

The criticism of house show performances becoming a departure from authentic DIY punk ideals was echoed during my own interviews. In these interviews, my interlocutors generally lauded house shows for their encouragement of active participation by attendees, but they also warned of house shows occasionally devolving into hedonistic parties where participants partake in alcohol and drug usage in the pursuit of self-pleasure. They lamented the lack of community engagement they perceived in these types of house show venues beyond allowing a performance space to local musicians. I spoke with one such participant, Chris Cotter, who operates a local “DIY space,” and also a recreation center, in Fort Worth, TX known as 1919 Hemphill, which is the address of the building.

Defining itself as a “DIY space,” 1919 Hemphill is an old warehouse in Fort Worth that is rented by members of the local scene and supported through donations by participants. The space is an all-ages venue that proclaims, both in its rhetoric and in signs around the building, “No Booze. No Drugs. No Jerks.[26]” The mission of 1919 Hemphill is to provide a safe space for people of all ages, genders, races/ethnicities to gather with particular emphasis placed on the sharing of music. The space was founded in 2002 and has served as a reliable space for local

[26] Interview with Chris Cotter, by phone, September 12, 2016

bands to play and as an effective hub for growing the scene. During my interviews with bands, particularly those from Fort Worth, they commented on the benefit of having 1919 Hemphill as a space for young musicians to gain experience performing[27]. Most importantly, 1919 Hemphill is entirely funded by donations, with suggested donations at the door for music performances, often from show attendees. However, Chris Cotter told me that regardless of one's donation, "Nobody with empty pockets would be kicked out of a 1919 show.[28]" My conversation with Chris and other musicians illustrated the significance this type of space, which is not profit-driven, has had on the Fort Worth and DFW music scene. Due to its longevity, the building reminds those who attend shows there of the mission of DIY punk which is designed to encourage active participation by all individuals.

During my interview with the operator, particular emphasis was placed on the additional services offered at 1919 Hemphill to illustrate what the goal of DIY punk and DIY culture should be. For example, 1919 Hemphill offers a radical lending library that allows people to borrow and return books, many of which focus on radical leftist political theory. 1919 Hemphill also holds an annual clothing drive and provides a space for participants to organize activist demonstrations. In contrast to house show venues, these types of DIY spaces such as 1919 Hemphill emphasize DIY punk as a larger ideology as opposed to just a genre of music. While house shows represent a championing of the DIY ideology, their sometimes-perceived narrow focus on music is often characterized as a lack of understanding of DIY punk culture. This criticism has led to many DIY participants perceiving some house shows as inauthentic.

[27] Interview with Same Brain, Fort Worth, July 3, 2016
[28] Interview with Chris Cotter, by phone, September 12, 2016

3.6. Space and the Soundscape

Given that participation and accessibility are central to punk culture, the character of the performance venue is key to adhering to punk notions of authenticity. DIY punk participants, in efforts to reclaim agency for their respective scenes, have placed particular emphasis on the creation of house venues to provide spaces for DIY punk performance. These house venues largely remove the financial incentive that motivates the owners of large clubs and bars and instead allows local participants the agency to plan and host shows.

The DFW DIY punk scene continues to grapple with the loss of its performance venues and house shows are perceived as a potential solution to provide reliable spaces for musicians to perform. For many participants, the house show is a welcome relief to the bar and club scenes, and the accessibility of the house show, which are typically all ages, has allowed participants the opportunity to expand their networks and grow the scene. However, scene members have criticized what they perceive as a house show culture that sometimes neglects the larger DIY ethic. In a scene that is increasingly suspicious of the motivations of other members, participants seek out ways in which to prevent enterprising actors from profiting off of the music culture that has been meticulously constructed in the metroplex. Emphasis on house show venues for these participants adheres to notions of what authentic DIY punk music making should be.

Events that celebrate the house show culture in DFW, such as F.U.C.K. Fest or Band Together Denton, have encouraged participation and collaboration between members of the scene to put-on shows by themselves. These festivals provide increased visibility to bands, but also reinforce the values of the scene and the larger DIY punk culture. House venues adhere to

that central tenet of DIY punk that is present in its namesake. They are where the members of the community do it themselves.

The setting of the house show allows musicians to construct a far more personal and immersive sonic experience for listeners where the space between audience and band is practically non-existent. Musicians are able to use these tiny confines to amplify perceived extra-musical sounds in ways that perpetuate the experience of the musical performance. The soundscape and setting of house shows encourage listeners to engage with each other and participate in music performance. It is in these spaces where the character of DIY punk becomes manifest, as participants cling to one another shouting and moving in unison. Any academic inquiry into DIY punk should explore this space where the ideology becomes practice.

Figure 3.1: Performance at Fannin House. Photo taken by Camille Aguirre. Denton.

Figure 3.2: Crowd Surfing at Thyroids F.U.C.K. Fest performance at Fannin House. Photo taken by Sean Peters. Denton, November 12, 2016.

CHAPTER 4

PERFORMING LIVE: THE GENESIS OF AUTHENTICITY

In the final two chapters of this thesis my aim is to shift focus to the sonic experience of DIY punk and explore how the music, both live and recorded, is designed to create an experience that conforms to the punk philosophy that has been discussed previously. In this chapter, I delve into the experience of live sets, where the musicians and attendees are able to express themselves with the least amount of mediation. As mentioned in the previous chapters, an "authentic" sound or setup in DIY punk should encourage and invoke participation from the listeners. In their sets, bands aim to construct an experience that folds the listener into a collective body and inspires a blurring of the distinction between musician and audience. Additionally, the sonic aesthetic used by punk bands is employed to subvert mainstream preferences on sound and challenge the listener to question their preconceptions on what constitutes "good music."

Live performances are where participants are able to feel all of the performative and extra-musical aspects of their sound that are crucial to one's experiencing of the music. Previously, I discussed how the manufactured and manicured performance of major-label rock bands was critiqued by punk participants who wanted a more active experience. During my interviews, I inquired into how musicians organize their sets and stage performance to encourage participation. Same Brain in particular were quick to emphasize the importance of spontaneity in their music performance and their concerns of being too rehearsed and their message becoming inauthentic.[29] Same Brain shared one anecdote of playing with a band who

[29] Interview with Same Brain, Fort Worth, July 3, 2016

rehearsed their stage presence and knew the exact time duration of their performance. When the other band posed the question to them, "How long is your set?" Same Brain responded with, "We don't fucking know. It's different every time.[30]" Same Brain's sentiment echoes throughout punk culture as the elaborate rehearsed shows of major-label bands create an experience that is entirely manufactured to manipulate the audience. Punk participants perceive the standardization of music performance, where everything is rehearsed and timed, as inauthentic. Each performance must be unique to be authentic due to the perception of authenticity in punk being temporally tied. While performing, in the "musical moment," everything must be experienced viscerally and immediately.

4.1. Sonic Dominance, Noisy Interludes, and Perception

Steve Goodman in his 2010 book *Sonic Warfare* explores the different ways in which sound can be employed. "Sonic warfare is the use of force, both seductive and violent, abstract and physical, via a range of acoustic machines, to modulate the physical, affective, and libidinal dynamics of populations, of bodies, of crowds" (Goodman 2010, 10). Goodman's book examines the ability of sound to break the listener and alter perception. Extending this idea, Julian Henriques in his article (2003), "Sonic Dominance and the Reggae Sound System Session," explores the Jamaican dancehall scene, and its use of "sonic dominance" to force the submission of the listener. In sonic dominance, "there's no escape, no cut off, no choice but to be there. Even more than music heard normally at this level, sound allows us to block out rational processes, making the experience imminent, immediate, and unmediated" (Henriques 2003, 452). These discussions illustrate the ability of the sonic to force the listener to submit,

[30] Interview with Same Brian, Fort Worth, July 3, 2016

but Henriques' article extends to the ability of sonic dominance to inspire vibe[31]. In these dancehall settings, the listener is forced out of an internalized experience through sheer sonic force and is brought together with their fellow participants. The sound is all encompassing, as it obscures individual identity and immerses the listener.

Punk musicians also use sound as a means to force the submission of the listener. A number of the punk musicians I interviewed were adamant that there should be no breaks during their sets, as it is in these breaks that the experience becomes opaque. The listener, in these breaks, is thrust from their collective state and brought back into the mundane world. These performances do not delineate between individual songs, but rather songs serve the function of furthering the experience of the listener. Thyroids, a punk group from Dallas, TX, create an interlude of noise as they loop feedback between songs while tuning. They remarked in our second interview that their reasoning for this was that it was easier for attendees to leave the space during breaks in the music.[32] In this sense, it is silence that disrupts, as it breaks the connection between musicians and audience. For punk participants, the sound of audio feedback initiates the listener into the experience, and between songs the feedback keeps the listener immersed in the aesthetic. Individual songs become obscured which allows the listener to feel the experience of the set holistically, as opposed to separate experiences of individually delineated songs. In our conversations, it was commented that performances should contain "peaks and troughs." These "noise" saturated interludes are the troughs that feed the peaks. The entire set takes on the form of a twenty-minute journey through these peaks and troughs.

[31] Timothy Taylor defines vibe as, "the urge to merge" (Taylor 2001)
[32] Interview with Kenneth Ramirez, Dallas, February 4, 2016

While the listener may wander in-between songs, the noises sounded by the musicians reign them in from leaving the collective. Again, these interludes are the troughs of punk performance. They are the contrasting of the palpable energy that is felt during songs, and they provide the tension leading up to that release of energy. The interlude allows the experience to flow and the energy to recharge. Then, suddenly, the various noises projecting out align into a unified sound as the energy of the experience is refocused. In this setup, the song emerges out of the noise abruptly, as the feedback turns to power chords and the rhythm becomes focused. Beyond obscuring the individual tracks, and allowing a more holistic experience for the listener, chaos gives birth to the songs. It nurtures the vibe of the crowd and the aesthetic of the experience until the song is ready to be brought forth. The noisy interludes allow the listener to summit each peak, as they are gently brought back to the troughs through the medium of noise.

Thin Skin's live performances draw on the use of sonic dominance to envelop the crowd and inspire vibe. Upon initially hearing a Thin Skin set, the listener is overwhelmed with the abrasive sound emanating from the drums, the audio feedback screeching from the guitar amp, and the screaming vocals. There is no reprieve between songs, as the musicians setup each track with an interlude composed of continued guitar wails and the sounds of wobbling cymbals. During this performance, the sound is meant to overwhelm the listener. As Katie Reese of Thin Skin commented, "Once it reaches that noisy level, where there is a lack of skill and structure… it breaks you apart.[33]" Thin Skin makes their sound sources almost unrecognizable through sheer volume and power. The senses are overwhelmed, as the

[33] Interview with Katie Reese, Denton, March 4, 2016

individual is forced to abandon beholding the music and must experience it. This aesthetic is designed to open up a world for the listener and bring them together with their fellow participants.

As evidenced in Thin Skin's performances, the chaotic timbre in punk music allows for the desired aesthetic to emerge for the listener. The noisiness conceals the individual instruments and provides a melding of the different voices into a unified aesthetic experience. Through the use of excessive distortion, and the flooding of instrument's tone with reverb, the voice of the instrument is obscured to the listener and disrupts the listener's experiencing of the instruments. The listeners are not receiving individual lines but rather a wave of sound that washes over them. When showing this music to others, their visceral response is to say "you can't even hear the words." This is intentional, as discussed in Chapter 1 in regards to cassette tapes; the aesthetic positions this music as separate from mainstream aesthetic preferences that my interlocutors perceived as often centering on lyrical content.

More importantly, the attempted deciphering of lyrics distracts the listener from fully engaging in the experience. This music is meant to be felt, not heard. As Kenny from Thyroids commented in our first interview, "As homo sapiens we try to straighten things out… [our music] lets their mind be free to ask questions, and create things in their own head that maybe are not socially okay.[34]" During my interview with Same Brain, they extended on Kenny's statement in describing how they wanted their sound to impact people, "Lose your mind. Get Weird. Don't hear the song. Feel the song."[35] Thyroids and Same Brain, in their quotes,

[34] Interview with Kenneth Ramirez, Garland, February 4, 2016
[35] Interview with Same Brain, Fort Worth, July 3, 2016

illustrate how the aesthetic is meant to impact the listener but at the same time lends agency to how they interpret, or "create," the sound. Obfuscation creates a sonic Rorschach test that allows people to find creative freedom in their submission to sonic dominance. For punk culture, the desired aesthetic obscures the individual instruments, as it is the experience of the sound that takes precedence; no individual instrument is prioritized over the others. A fitting analogy for this could be the mist that obscures the "picture" in a Chinese silk-screen painting as described by Paul Berliner, "the mist is an integral part of such paintings, establishing mood and feeling, and the figures are not supposed to be seen more clearly" (Berliner 1993, 11). Like the mist in the silk-screen painting, noise in punk culture conceals and contextualizes the music. The individual instruments, and the text of the song, are not for beholding; they are for experiencing.

But how do the musicians perceive the sound? Harris Berger in his article (1997), "The Practice of Perception," advocates for the role of the subject in the way in which people perceive music. Berger focuses specifically on the way musicians may shift their focus to different divisions of rhythm to accomplish a specific musical goal (Berger 1997). Extending practice theory, this shift illustrates the listener's agency in dictating how the music is experienced, but it gives credence to the social structures that construct the listener's perspective. When I inquired into the aural focus of my interlocutors during performance, they insisted on a holistic way of listening. These musicians listen to the collective voice of the sounds in the space as opposed to individual instrument lines. However, they are keenly aware of the aesthetic, or affect, that they are attempting to convey to their audience. Their decisions to implement specific noisy sounds during performances are inspired by their reading of the

crowd. Noise in this sense is what lends the musician the agency that Berger discusses. They operate within the prescribed structure of the music, and they hear the music holistically like their audience. Through the implementing of noise, they are capable of altering the experience of the listener. Audio feedback, or other "noisy sounds," can be inserted into a performance for emphasis or to further foster a connection with the audience. In punk performance, sounds that are typically perceived as undesirable come to be treated as an accent or emphasis. It can grab the listener at the climax of the performance, or rather at the peak, and heighten the experience.

4.2. In the "Pit"

On a mild night in February in Denton, Texas I found myself in a narrow alley in the shadow of Texas Woman's University. I ambled my way to a small, plainly decorated, one-story house lovingly referred to by locals as the Pink Cactus. The front yard is largely unremarkable save the five-foot tall cactus wrapped in, what appears to be, a pink bed sheet. Nestled in a small neighborhood of similarly unremarkable houses, and across the street from a bank, the Pink Cactus has become a hub of the local Denton music scene. I walked through the porch, where attendees smoke cigarettes and discuss the evening's performances, and knocked gingerly on the wooden front door. The owner of the house greeted me and opened the door revealing the tiny front room where the performance was to happen. He was taken aback by my knocking as opposed to merely walking in. The Pink Cactus, while a private residence, serves as a communal space for the Denton music scene, where attendees flow in and out of the house. The sound beckons them in, and upon its silence, they shift back to the conversational atmosphere of the porch. This knock not only challenged typical attitudes of the Pink Cactus,

and the norms of punk house shows, but it challenged the notion of the space as communal and signified my identity as an outsider.

In the small performance space, which doubles as a living room during the day, there was a drum mat and a large recording console. The musicians began to setup as three-quarters of the performance space became obscured by amps, instruments, and various types of cables. The door hinges' squeak became more frequent as attendees streamed into the room occupying whatever voids they could find. The buzz of conversations between participants dominates the space prior to performance. It is in these discursive events, the conversations between attendees, that participants begin to reduce the distance between them, and a sense of family fills the already intimate space of the home.

Figure 4.1: Thyroids at the Pink Cactus. Screenshot from video on Denton Live Bands Youtube channel. Denton, February 14, 2016.

The band took their place amongst the cords against the backdrop of the booming speakers. The lights cut out, and only a small multi-colored strobe light illuminated the

anticipating faces of the attendees. A crunchy guitar tone reverberated through the amplifier, as Kenny, the guitarist and lead vocalist, knelt down to adjust his pedals. Everything about a Thyroids show is meant to disrupt. The guitar tone is reminiscent of an AM radio. The sound arches over the space in what Kenny referred to as the "dome effect.[36]" The participatory setting of the house show, with its lack of a stage, is unique in this experience. The musicians and audience are enveloped into this dome of sound that protects them from the outside world. While in the crowd, within this dome, participants are able to join together and achieve vibe.

As the set begins, the rhythm lulls the listener into a sense of security. The expectations of the listener are fed as the crowd begins to sway together. However, just as the listener is brought in, the experience comes to a crashing halt as feedback screeches through the amplifiers. Here, noise disorients, it subverts the expectations of the listener. The individual tries in vain to find their bearings, or rather to "straighten out" the experience. But noise overpowers the listeners and forces them to submit to the sound. Noise brings people together, as they move together, react together, and listen together. Audio feedback becomes re-contextualized from a technical issue to the glue that holds the whole experience together. Screaming becomes a catalyst to the achievement of vibe, as it breaks liminal states and brings the crowd to feel together. Noise is catharsis. Where words fail, noise speaks.

As the set continues I move in unison with the strangers standing next to me, while occasionally shuffling out of the way to avoid being hit by the door as it opens and more attendees flood into the room. There's little interaction between the band and the audience in

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[36] Interview with Kenneth Ramirez, Garland, February 4, 2016

the way of lyrics or acknowledgments between songs. The vocals are flooded with reverb until the text is almost indecipherable. Any type of break in sound runs the risk of releasing the listener from their collective state. I feel myself reacting to the band's movement, as well as the movement of my fellow attendees. Kenny lurched into the audience during one of his solos, and the crowd moves together to support him. His thrashing disrupts the audience's space, but through this collective experience they embrace the noise and move together. His body is transformed into a conduit for noise and a connection between audience and musician. For twenty minutes, the sound fills the listener's body, as they are brought into the intersubjective milieu with their fellow participants. Vibe is achieved through the brute force of sound and submission by the listener. We give ourselves to the experience.

Noise at these shows is seductive, as it beckons in the audience. During my interviews musicians were adamant about noise's ability to bring the individual into the intersubjective milieu. As Kenny Ramirez commented in our second interview, "We are composed of waves.[37]" The shared vibrating of our "waves" allows us to tune into each other's resonance. In this sense, a "mutual tuning-in" (Schutz 1976) can be fostered through the shared experience of live music performance and the shared submission to noise. Noise is a connection to other human beings, and it is a calling out for an unmediated expression of the human condition. Punk music performances channel noise to bring people in and provide a way of knowing that is entirely experiential.

[37] Interview with Kenneth Ramirez, Garland, February 4, 2016

4.3. Listening Live

The use of sound, and particularly extra-musical sounds, to overwhelm the senses of the listener and bring them into a collective experience with their fellow attendees was cited by most of the individuals I spoke with. The re-assessing of noise from its initial definition of "unwanted sound" to becoming one of the defining characteristics of the punk aesthetic illustrates how punk authenticity functions in practice. Noise here subverts societal norms on the perception of good music and shocks the listener's ear. This was cited by my interlocutors who employed "noisy" sounds to elicit reactions out of their audiences. Moreover, a re-assessment of what constitutes "good music" forces the individual to question their preconceptions of sound. Ultimately, the aesthetic of punk music is meant to articulate punk philosophy in a visceral way. The three-chord songs and chaos have a larger impact than merely shocking the audience as the simplicity of the music is meant to reinforce to its listeners that anyone can do this.

Live performances offer DIY punk bands the opportunity to directly engage with their listeners without the mediation of the internet. In the tiny living rooms of scene members, people are able to gain a holistic understanding of everything this music means to its participants. My aim in this chapter is to delve into the experience of the live performances of my interlocutors in an effort to give the reader an idea of that experience. Given the premise offered by a number of my interlocutors in this chapter, that the music should be felt as opposed to heard, a truly authentic experiencing of DIY punk requires that the individual be present in the space where all of the sensual stimuli of the music can be understood. It is therefore imperative for any researcher working within this community to occupy those living

rooms and experience that “sonic dominance” that brings one into a collective experience to fully grasp the significance of DIY punk.

CHAPTER 5

SOUNDING LIVE AND THE PUNK STUDIO EXPERIENCE

Driving down the deserted side streets of Denton, TX late on a Thursday night, the sounds of Fort Worth punk band Not Half Bad's single "Newports" blared from my car speakers. As the song progressed into the bridge, I patiently anticipated the climactic final return of the chorus. However, as the music reached its decrescendo, I began to hear the sound of people conversing. Surprised that someone would be walking around at such a late hour, I looked out my window to identify the source of the sound but saw nobody. Slightly disoriented, I soon realized the source of the sound was from my car's speakers and that the conversations were indeed a part of the "music." As I will discuss later in this chapter, when prompted about this aesthetic choice in their recording the members of Not Half Bad remarked that they were attempting to simulate a house show.[38] For these musicians, sound, in this case the buzz of conversing attendees which can be heard in the soundscape of almost every house show, has a unique ability to break through the mediation inherent in studio recordings. It can transport the listener from whatever place they are, be that in a car or wherever, to the place where the music happens, where the individual is surrounded and enveloped into the soundscape.

Scholarly inquiries into punk rock tend to focus on the material objects and style associated with the subculture (Hebdige 1979; Moore 2004), as well as the D.I.Y. ethic (Dunn 2012). The hairstyles, leather jackets, and clothes pins convey an attitude that extends far beyond the realm of music. But how are punk aesthetic preferences expressed through sound? In this chapter, I discuss how punk bands perceive the studio, or a "studio sound," and how

[38] Interview with Matt Scifres and Alex Weymier, Denton, October 22, 2015

they behave when recording. I begin by first examining how punk musicians get access to the studio and the power dynamic between punk musicians and audio engineers. This relationship has undergone a dramatic shift with increased access to training as an audio engineer, as well as access to more affordable recording equipment. Punk musicians have taken advantage of this increased access by pursuing degrees and certificates in sound recording. They are then able to access the language of recording studios, thus effectively giving them more power and access to another level of creativity in making recordings. I focus on how punk bands perceive the studio, and the techniques they implement to bring elements of live performance into the space, which often use hi-fi recording technology to evoke a sense of lo-fi aesthetics and "being there" in the music.

I offer Timothy Taylor's concept of "vibe," which he defines as "the urge to merge," as a means for punk bands to achieve a live feel in the studio (Taylor 2001). The musicians and audio engineers cite the idea of "vibe" as being crucial to the musical moment; or rather that "vibe" informs the performance and their ability to index liveness. Emphasis on sound sources, altering one's state of mind, as well as technical aspects like the number of microphones used and microphone placement are all means to index liveness for these groups. I also point to space as central to punk music making, as the bands attempt to incorporate the soundscapes of their live performances into their recordings. I argue that this presents the audience, as well as the performance space, as participants in music making. This experience blurs the boundary between performer, audience, and place in recorded punk music. Ultimately, punk recordings are meant to translate "vibe," that sense of liveness, onto the record. The choices made by

these bands in the studio serve the purpose of conveying that vibe back to the audience and thus, an authentic punk listening experience.

For this chapter, I center on two prominent punk bands based in the North Texas area: Not Half Bad (Fort Worth, TX), and The Wee-Beasties (Denton, TX). The interviews focus on the musicians' experiences with recording, as well as the sound they try to attain in their music. I include interviews with audio engineers who have experience recording punk bands. These interviews explore the relationship between musicians and engineer, as well as how they capture an "authentic" punk sound. The recording practices I discuss here illustrate how authenticity in punk music is uniquely connected to a "live" experience. In many of my interviews, a key concern expressed by the musicians was that they were perceived as a "live band," or rather a band that sounded better live than recorded. For these punk bands the central question remains, how to capture liveness on a recording?

5.1. Technical Authority: Punk and Audio Engineering

Education, particularly familiarity with studio lingo, in audio engineering has dramatically impacted punk musicians' role in the recording studio and how they are listening to music. In her 2003 book *Sound of Africa!,* Louise Meintjes details the relationship between the White audio engineers and Black musicians in the studio during Apartheid-era South Africa. Meintjes' discussion, of what I'm referring to as "technical authority," highlights how familiarity with recording technology and language allows the audio engineer to gain a level of authority over the musicians in the studio context. "Lack of technical knowledge, technical lexicons… lace additional barriers between music-makers and their studio interiors and between experts, laborers, and capital" (Meintjes 2003, 102). One of the common themes that emerged in my

research was that members of these North Texas bands, unlike the musicians in *Sound of Africa!,* received formal training and certifications in audio engineering from local technical institutes offering classes on sound recording. These institutions have allowed punk musicians the opportunity to assume a level of authority in the studio through familiarity with equipment and the ability to negotiate sound at a deeper level with audio engineers. The studio space has been demystified for the musician allowing them greater agency in conforming the technology to meet their needs. The education received by punk musicians contextualizes the equipment and space of the studio in relation to the people who are doing the music making.

Key to placing the studio in its relation to people is the socialization of the information, technology, and language of the studio. "Socialization matters so intensely because it is crucial to both professional identity and competence," writes Thomas Porcello in his article (2004) on sound and language in the recording studio (Porcello 2004, 738). Understanding how to use equipment and speak the language of the recording studio allows the musicians to exercise more control over their sound while using the exact measurements of sonic qualities. In one anecdote, Sergio Garcia, an audio engineer, detailed his experience of recording a fellow engineer's punk band. Because of the colleague's familiarity with the setting and language, this particular session was efficient and resulted in a quality recording.[39] The individual's understanding of studio language, and specifically quantifying sound quality, allowed them to easily relay the desired tone to the audio engineer. The musicians I spoke with often cited their experience in the studio, and particularly their understanding of sound, as a way of privileging their perspective in negotiations with other participants. Education, in particular learning the

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[39] Interview with Sergio Garcia, by phone, October 30, 2015

language of the studio, allows the musicians to retain proprietary control over the recording process through an intimate understanding of sound recording technology.

5.2. Sounding Liveness

Performing liveness in the studio and its link to authenticity has been explored in previous scholarship by Aaron Fox and Thomas Porcello (Fox 1992; Porcello 2002). This section discusses different strategies implemented by punk bands to bring a sense of liveness to their recordings and what this means to the musicians and their audience. This includes an examination of the technical aspects of recording, such as microphone placement, but I aim to extend the sounding of liveness to incorporate the idea of "vibe." Vibe is important here because it addresses how these bands and their audience are listening and reacting to the music. Achieving the desired state of mind, or environment for the musical moment, allows for nuances to emerge in the unconventional setting of the studio. I organize this discussion into three parts. I start by discussing the extra-musical factors that help these bands achieve vibe and their ability to convey liveness. I then focus on microphone choice and placement. Finally, I focus on the soundscape of the spaces where live performances happen. Here, I assert that the space in which punk rock is typically performed, houses and bars, is central to the experience and authenticity of the music. Where Fox and Porcello examined aspects like text, timbre, and microphone placement as simulating liveness, I add performative and seemingly ritual factors into how liveness is performed in the studio.

"Participatory discrepancies," and particularly textural discrepancies, as described by Charles Keil illustrate the importance of live performance and the achievement of vibe. Keil's use of the word "discrepancy" is meant to convey the slightly "off" aspects of music, he cites

the exchange between bass and drums in swing music, that encourage the listener to participate. "If you can participate once, in one song… you can do it more times and in more ways until you are 'at one' with the entire universe" (Keil 1987, 276). As I will discuss later in this chapter, punk musician's evoking liveness in the studio illustrates the celebration of the "out of tune." The celebration of the out of tune champions the human elements, or aspects of the music that are felt and hard to quantify, in music making. Matt Scifres commented on the championing of human experience and connection in live settings, "The charm of a live setting is the little imperfections because you are taking home something… that only you and a few other people had.[40]" This statement emphasizes the participatory discrepancies of a live show, as well as the collective experience. There is an assertion made that each performance provides a different experience for the audience or a different time/way in which to participate. This suggests that how the music is experienced is tied temporally to the musical moment. Audiences are listening to the environment in punk music as well as to themselves, because they are physically present in the space. "Authentic" punk music making requires these "little imperfections" that exist in live performances, and the standardization of a song through its recording contradicts this celebration of variation. During my fieldwork, the songs performed varied between performances in regards to their tempo, lyrical content, structure, and numerous other qualities. The removal of imperfections and variation in musical performance that happens in the studio would seem to make recording punk music inherently "inauthentic," which is an issue these musicians attempt to remedy through simulating liveness and the achievement of vibe.

[40] Interview with Matt Scifres, by Skype, November 25, 2015

Moreover, as I discussed in the first chapter, David Novak's exploration of recording techniques by "world music" artists uncovered the indexical associations tied to distortion in the music's recordings. "[Distortion] verifies that regional popular music is still 'raw' and therefore unintegrated into the fidelities of the music industry" (Novak 2011, 627). Novak's quote can equally be applied to the pursuit of liveness by punk musicians. Here, liveness not only invokes the listener's experiences of live performances, but the lo-fi quality of the sound is a signal to the listener that the music has not been co-opted by the music industry and that the musicians remain independent.

5.3. Vibe

In his 2001 book, *Strange Sounds*, Timothy Taylor details how members of the Goa EDM scene (Electronic Dance music events originating in Goa, India during the late 1980s) in New York City during the late 1990s partook in, what he suggests is a ritual, consuming ecstasy as a way of dealing with their liminality. Ecstasy for these participants is a catalyst to "vibe," which Taylor defined as "the urge to merge." (Taylor 2001). The concept of "vibe" was mentioned a number of times in my fieldwork in interviews with bands and audio engineers. The pursuit of the right "vibe" in these contexts informed everything from how to setup the studio to alcohol being consumed by the musicians and audio engineers. In all cases, constructing and nurturing the vibe allowed the musicians to fully participate in the musical moment. In my interviews, notions about the correct vibe were tied to an ability to index liveness. For example, punk bands will often record as a collective group, rather than individual takes for each instrument. The musical moment, and "the urge to merge," would seem to be felt more strongly in this type of setting that places the musicians and instruments in context with each other (the actual

merging of their sounds in space). This approach asserts the importance of the collaborative aspects of the music and how humans interact with each other sonically.

Similar to the taking of ecstasy in Taylor's ethnography of the EDM scene, my interview with the audio engineer Brandon Lotspeich revealed that consumption of alcohol inspired vibe in the studio. For example, while recording their 2011 album, *Kill Them!,* the Wee-Beasties consumed alcohol in the studio as a means for achieving the vibe, which they associate with their live shows. This album was recorded in a single evening and released within six weeks of its recording.[41] In this recording experience not only did the band drink alcohol, but they required the audio engineer to do the same. While Taylor was exploring actual live performances, the consumption of different substances to achieve a better vibe can be found in both examples.

The Wee-Beasties' recording session also highlights an interesting juxtaposition in regards to how musicians conceptualize the studio. In Louise Meintjes' research on the South African band *Izintombi Zesimanje*, she discusses how South African musicians perceive the recording studio. "By thinking of the studio as a fetish, I reify it into an object that can procure for those who have earned access to it the services of that force, or 'spirit,' lodged within it" (Meintjes 2003, 73-74). Here, the studio is removed from the ordinary, as it becomes a sacred space for music making. For these South African musicians, the studio is "magical" and has its own "spirit" that grants the musicians the ability to create "compelling art" (ibid, 73). This fetishization of the studio is contrasted by The Wee-Beasties' treatment of the space. The Wee-Beasties attempt to bring the studio back into the realm of the ordinary; they construct the

[41] Interview with Brandon Lotspeich, Fort Worth, September 15, 2015

space to resemble a live show. Consuming alcohol, as well as inviting friends (mostly significant others of the band members) who were not active participants in the music making, the atmosphere of the recording session was transformed into a social event. The Wee-Beasties, who are noted for their rowdy live performances, bring in the familiar elements of their live shows such as alcohol and an audience in an effort to recreate the vibe and subsequent live feel associated with participatory music making. They bring the studio back into the realm of the ordinary, and they challenge the perception of the studio as a sacred space.

“Vibe” then becomes identified as essential to the translation of an authentic performance into a recording, and the consumption of alcohol is a key to achieving that state. It should also be noted that the majority of this record was recorded as an ensemble, with a few overdubs after the initial recording. Keeping in mind that this album was recorded over the course of one evening, the entire recording experience of this album can be thought of as an extended concert, which appears to be the atmosphere the band was attempting to cultivate. This particular recording experience illustrates a demystification of the studio in punk rock. While my interlocutors offered various strategies to recording, The Wee-Beasties approach empowers and privileges the collaboration between people, and participatory music making, over the more calculated approach typically associated with the studio. The instruments, the alcohol, and the audience all come to be intrinsically linked to the music and the vibe.

5.4. Microphones

Thomas Porcello in his article (2002), “Music Mediated as Live in Austin,” discusses the significance of liveness to listeners, and how bands simulate their live performances in the studio. His research points to the microphones and their positioning as important factors in the

indexing of liveness, and presents the drums as the nexus for achieving a live sound. The microphone setup, with emphasis on the drums, uncovers significant variation between punk bands. For example, Not Half Bad uses a microphone on each individual drum, as well as overhead microphones for the cymbals, to exercise complete control over the sound of the kit. In contrast, The Wee-Beasties opt not to record each individual drum and instead favor fewer microphones in an effort to record a collective sound of the drum set. The choice for fewer microphones is inspired by a pursuit of a lo-fi aesthetic, as this lack of definition blends the different drums together. The instructions they gave to their audio engineer was to only use three microphones on the drum set during the recording session, a relatively small setup.[42] These microphones were placed in front of the bass drum, on the snare, and slightly to the left of the floor tom.

The microphone setup for The Wee-Beasties' recording session is indicative of aesthetic preferences of the band and, to a larger extent, punk aesthetic preferences. The snare drum and bass drum, which are crucial to the punk sound and timekeeping, receive their own microphones. However, the positioning of the third microphone treats the kit as a collective unit. Here, The Wee-Beasties are recording the drum set sounds in relation to the room in what Porcello calls, "recording the room." Recording the room is a method of simulating liveness through capturing the "reverberant, ambient sound" (Porcello 2002, 76). This recording practice re-contextualizes the music as happening in a physical space instead of the sounds being abstracted from each other in the sterile environment of a studio. Recording the room emphasizes the sound of the space, and inspires the sense of a live performance.

[42] Interview with Brandon Lotspeich, Fort Worth, September 15, 2015

5.5. Space as Instrument

Recording the room illustrates the importance of studio performances happening in a physical space. But how does the typical space of the live performance relate to the studio? In Steve Feld's 1994 book *Music Grooves*, he released a live recording, in collaboration with Mickey Hart, of the Bosavi in the rainforest. A commercial release, *Voices of the Rainforest* relies on manipulation of the soundscape, both in the studio and in the actual recording. The production of this CD demonstrates an attempt to bring nature (environment/space) into the studio, or rather to conform the sounds of the rainforest to the typical recording practices of the studio. Feld in these recordings uses an elaborate field-recording package, for my purposes of particular interest is the noise-reduction unit (Feld 1994). This equipment would seem to be an attempt at privileging the perceived "musical" sounds and muting the undesirable sounds, what might be referred to as "noise." In this production, "music" comes to be treated as abstract from its environment. My research highlights an interesting contrast. Whereas Feld downplays the perceived "non-musical" elements of the rainforest in this release, punk musicians emphasize "noise" in their recordings by bringing the space into the studio.

My interviews with bands highlighted an appreciation of the space where the music is performed. The musicians I interviewed emphasized sound sources as the key to indexing specific messages. For example, during a recording session for Not Half Bad the band used a wooden chair slammed on the floor rather than a bass drum. Their justification for this choice was that it gave more of a "live feel" to the song. This point is particularly interesting in that the wooden chair, which is common in many bars, comes to be recognized for its distinct sonic quality. The sound of this chair hitting the floor serves as a means to bring liveness to the

recording with a sound that would be a frequent occurrence and recognizable at a punk show. Moreover, what would generally be ignored, or regarded as "noise," comes to play a prominent role in the music. The sounds of the space, or rather the background noise of the performance venue (bar), are central to the listening experience. Punk music is tied to this environmental "noise." Bands, understanding the central role that noise and liveness play in notions of authenticity, have incorporated these sounds into their music as a way of indexing authenticity and inspiring vibe in their recordings.

In conceptualizing the relationship between music and space in punk, it is helpful to understand space as a participant in the music making, as an instrument. My experience at Not Half Bad's live performances witnessed frequent yelling, and conversation, between audience members and the band. These exchanges occurred both during and between songs. This soundscape is translated into the studio in the song, "Newports," off their full LP *Good People*. To simulate this environment, the band told me they made an aesthetic choice to include the four band members yelling from each corner of the room into an omnidirectional microphone.[43] For these groups, studio-recording practices have decontextualized punk rock by ignoring the social history of the "noise" and its relation to the music. The song in this sense becomes re-contextualized in its social history embracing every voice participating in the music making process. The soundscape of the space is transferred into the music, which indexes the atmosphere and sense of "vibe" that is present at live performances. This effect is achieved through the manipulation of sound through the use of technology. The hi-fi omnidirectional microphone and the carefully constructed space of the studio are manipulated to emulate the

[43] Interview with Matt Scifres and Alex Weymier, Denton, October 22, 2015

lo-fi sonic environment of a house show. The “noise” of the space, in this case the conversations that occur during performances or the sounds of the wooden chair, are linked to the music. My interpretation suggests that the audience at a punk show has an equal role in the music making which further demonstrates the emphasis on collective experience and participation in the punk scene. Music making becomes a collective effort undertaken by both performer and audience, where the distinction between the two becomes blurred.

The “Newports” recording represents a blurring of the distinction between audience and performer. Not Half Bad performs the role of audience members, asserting the noise of the audience as a participant in the music. They listen to the crowd, which suggests a conversation between performer and audience. To borrow from Jacques Attali, “An exchange between bodies… to play for the other and by the other, to exchange the noises of bodies, to hear the noises of others in exchange for one’s own, to create, in common, the code within which communication will take place” (1985, 143). Communication between band and audience occurs in the “noise.” The band is listening to the room, and the audience is reacting to the music. The incorporation of the audience into the recording is that exchange of noise, with Not Half Bad adding another line to the conversation.

5.6. Evoking Liveness with Audio Feedback

Audio feedback is something that all musicians, who use electronic equipment, grapple with in the studio and in live performances. Fort Worth garage band Same Brain were adamant about feedback’s potential to create a unique experience for listeners, “feedback is holding your breath for what is about to happen and then it drops.[44]” Same Brain went on to comment

[44] Interview with Same Brain, Fort Worth, July 3, 2016

that they believe their audience often felt their use of feedback was a mistake or a technical difficulty. Same Brain enjoyed this believing that this perception of feedback made their performance seem less rehearsed and more sincere. Moreover, similar to David Novak's discussion of the aesthetic of cassettes allowing underground scenes to retain proprietary control over their music, Same Brain believes that "noisy" sounds like feedback prevent garage punk music from appealing to mainstream audiences. Feedback for these bands is used for the "sonic dominance" effect explored in the previous chapter, but it also serves as a type of gatekeeper to prevent "moneymen" from exploiting punk music.

A cursory search on the internet yields numerous websites describing audio feedback and offering solutions on how to eliminate it from one's sound. However, the musicians I interviewed incorporate the sound of audio feedback, and even manipulate the sound of audio feedback, into their recordings. In one particular video recorded during a studio session, Matt Scifres, from Not Half Bad, is listening to audio feedback tracks being played back to him on a computer. Here, the use of feedback as an instrument is an aesthetic choice by the band, with the engineer manipulating the sound of the feedback in an effort to get the right tone for the specific song they are mixing. This example illustrates the treatment of feedback as an instrument, or rather the treatment of noise as an instrument where the timbre and frequency are adjusted to conform to the song. According to Matt Scifres in our second interview, audio feedback in this context "[implies] a live setting," or rather that audio feedback is a common occurrence at live shows where microphone and amplifier levels require frequent adjustments.[45] Similar to the simulation of audience noise or the use of the wooden chair,

[45] Interview with Matt Scifres, by Skype, November 25, 2015

audio feedback brings the studio back into the realm of the ordinary. It evokes the sense of space in which Not Half Bad frequently performs and brings that sense onto the record.

5.7. Understanding Liveness in the Studio

The common thread during interviews with my interlocutors while conducting fieldwork has been the celebration of participatory music making. Punk culture, since its inception, has championed participation by all individuals and pushed back against what they perceive as the exclusionary practices of the mainstream music industry, which idolizes performers and draws clear distinctions between musician and audience. This championing of participation can be found in the aforementioned famous poster printed in punk fanzine, Sideburns, which diagrammed three guitar chords and encouraged readers to “form a band” (Moon 1977). In this chapter, I have discussed how musicians translate the values of participation, which are central to punk ideology and notions of authenticity in punk performance, into the ostensibly sterile and mediated space of the recording studio. The studio represents a challenge to punk musicians, as recordings create distance between audience and performer in the experiencing of the music. It removes punk from its proper context and lacks the soundscape that is imperative to an authentic experience of punk performance. I have explored how by recreating elements of their live show in the studio, by bringing in friends or consuming alcohol, musicians attempt to capture the experience of their live performances. This is also done sonically through the recording of sounds commonly heard at live shows, which are referential to live experience. The pursuit of liveness by these bands is an attempt at asserting the importance of participation in music making. For punk musicians and fans, music is not for the beholding, but rather for the experiencing.

An approach emphasizing sound offers new insight into punk music, and other similar inquiries have illustrated this perspective (Tatro 2014). My aim here is to further explore the studio experience for punk musicians and to understand how a genre, which is inextricably linked to its performance space, comes to be recorded. Access to education and equipment has allowed punk bands to exert more control over their music in the studio. They challenge the notion of the studio as a “magical” place in an effort to bring the experience back into the ordinary. Music making for these participants is a collective undertaking, which encourages participation and the fostering of connection through the experience of sound. Collective experience and the lo-fi come to be championed in this participatory culture, blurring the boundary between performer and audience.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

My experiences in the cramped living rooms of DFW entrenched in the pit with fellow attendees, perfectly encapsulates the spirit of DIY punk culture. At the core of the culture is the reduction of distance between participants. Here, they are encouraged to work together to build, not only a local scene, but a larger network that invites people to interact and express themselves free of mediation by the mainstream music industry. As I've explored in this thesis, this reduction of distance happens in a literal and visceral sense at live performances where people are packed tightly together in a crowd, but it is also a reduction of the distance between participants and the music making process as participants take responsibility for their scene.

Matt Scifres' assertion, "authenticity is everything," resonated throughout my fieldwork. The pursuit of the authentic continues to be a compass for participants to defend and define the values that are championed within the culture. For punk participants, authentic punk music making was implemented as a way to perform, record, and disseminate music. In response to the perceived passivity of people in regards to music making, at the heart of this philosophy is the belief that music should be an active experience. Participants were moved to create their own publications, start their own bands, and connect with people in their community and globally.

This pursuit of authenticity and the championing of participation is perhaps most evident in the performance spaces of the DFW DIY punk scene. Participants in this scene, in an attempt to provide more reliable spaces for performance, have offered their houses as performance spaces to DIY punk bands. Moreover, members of the DFW scene have expressed

their preference for house show performances and have cited the unique atmosphere as contributing to a better experience for themselves and show attendees. The optics of a house show performance, literally inside a person's home, are major factors in contributing to the atmosphere described by these participants, but the increased accessibility to fans also plays a large role in reducing the distance between musician and audience. It was my experiences in house shows, some of which are detailed in this thesis, that allowed me to glean significant information about the core of punk culture. Authenticity, in punk culture, is found in those moments where one comes to know the other through their shared sensual experience of sound. It is my contention that these experiences foster unique connections between individuals and aid in fostering a sense of community among participants. In this sense, the authentic is a moment in time, as opposed to the style Dick Hebdige discusses or the philosophies of the hardcore scene in the 1980s, with the recreation of the moment being constantly pursued by participants and musicians both at live performances and in the quest for liveness in the studio.

The soundscape of the performance is a key to achieving an authentic punk experience. Bands go to great lengths to simulate the aural environment of their live performances into their studio recordings. As I discussed, this includes simulating audience noise in the studio and other extra-musical sounds or "noise." These noises are absolutely essential to providing the proper aesthetic for punk performance and, as discussed, also reassert the audience's central role in music making. These extra-musical sounds are used in live performances to perpetuate the experience by keeping a sense of continuity between songs to keep the listener engaged

with the music. In DIY punk, it is the live performance space that is reified and championed. What happens in that space is perceived as the authentic experience of that music.

This thesis explores the DIY punk scene and how participants of the scene enact notions of authenticity in both the sounds and performance spaces of the culture. The DIY punk scene offers an interesting case study in how people have responded to the enterprising actors in the mainstream music industry who treat music as a product. For DIY punk participants, music builds communities and allows the individual to join in a collective identity with their fellow participants. The values of the culture, such as, getting involved, asserts the role of the people in creating music. In contrast to previous punk scholarship, which focuses on the non-musical aspects of punk culture, my aim in this thesis has been to treat DIY punk as music, as it is in the living room, surrounded by others, where the culture is enacted.

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