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The DIY Ethic in Richmond, Virginia's Underground Music Community

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Introduction

In the 1980's and 90's, Washington DC was the regional center of punk subculture on America's East Coast. Countless influential bands in this genre got their start in the nation's capital, including Bad Brains, Fugazi, and Minor Threat (Norton 2012). These bands helped to popularize what is now known as the DIY, or "Do It Yourself" scene. The self-reliant DIY attitude would spread beyond punk and influence generations of musicians of all genres to detach themselves from major record labels and radio stations. DIY bands started independent labels, and got their start playing at small bars and house venues. DC became home to countless DIY spaces, especially live music venues where bands played and made a name for themselves among like-minded enthusiasts. In 2024, few remnants of this scene exist in Washington. The house venues, small record stores, and $5 concerts have gone extinct. What remains are the major clubs and stadiums that host internationally successful artists for DC's growing upper-class population. This is a common trend in major cities around the country, where the musical underground is being priced out of the places it once called home.

However, about two hours south of DC, one can find this distinct type of music culture alive and well in the city of Richmond, Virginia. I discovered this "underground" of musicians, enthusiasts, concert venues, and record labels while attending the College of William & Mary, located roughly 50 miles from Virginia's capital city. Growing up as a fan of punk and metal in the DC suburbs, I was familiar with the large club shows and major-label acts that regularly played near my home. When I was able to experience Richmond's active DIY scene, it felt as though I was witnessing a community that I had only read about, or heard described from aging

punks and metalheads at shows. As I soon learned, Richmond has a long history of underground music and subculture. But unlike DC, DIY never left Richmond.

As I began to study underground music in Richmond VA, I recognized that DIY ways of thinking permeated nearly every aspect of the scene, both musically and culturally. Because of this, I kept the questions related to DIY in mind while conducting my research. I argue the following: Richmond's underground music community is guided by the “DIY ethic”. The application of the DIY (Do It Yourself) ethic helps to explain the reasons for the community’s unique practices. These include elements directly related to the music creation process such as recording practices and the creation of new genre labels. It also includes elements that impact the broader culture of the scene, including social activism and practices like moshing.

My interest in Richmond DIY began after I met Max, a William & Mary student and member of the school’s Metal club. I first attended this club towards the end of my freshman year, when it was still meeting online via Zoom due to COVID-19 restrictions. When I joined we spoke about our shared interest in heavy music. I soon learned that, despite his club’s name, Max was primarily interested in hardcore punk music. After realizing he also lived in Northern VA, I asked him to play bass for my alternative rock band Ampliphobia, as our previous bass player had quit months before. Over the summer, while practicing with Ampliphobia, we agreed to start a hardcore punk project upon returning to William & Mary. From there we recruited Adam, a freshman and metal club member, to play guitar. Cass, my high school friend and longtime musical collaborator, joined as our vocalist. I would play the drums. We decided to name the

project Straitjacket, at the suggestion of Max. Max would go on to write the majority of the music for the band, which is still active today.

Over the next two years I continued to grow more familiar with the local hardcore scene as Max drove me to shows in Richmond. I became acquainted with Richmond's DIY venues, including the Warehouse, OSB, and VSC. Many of my observations from this project come from simply attending these shows and speaking to fans and performers. It was these initial experiences of the DIY scene that inspired me to write about the community in an academic context. As Straitjacket continued to write and record music, Max also began networking with the local scene to book Straitjacket at venues in the area. This ethnography includes observations from shows at which Straitjacket was performing as openers for more established local and touring bands.

From its onset, the goal of my research was to study Richmond's underground music community through the analytical perspective of sociocultural anthropology. To do this, I employed three main methods. The first is participant observation. I entered underground music spaces as an outsider, with the intention of understanding the practices of these communities through talking to and observing people in their typical social environments. My participation in this scene was furthered by Straitjacket's desire to establish itself as a performing act in the local scene. My participation as a drummer in this band allowed me to observe the community from the perspective of both a musician and concert attendee. Secondly, I incorporated interviews into my research. After speaking with some core members of the community, I felt that prolonged interviews would allow me to better understand the beliefs and observations of these key individuals. These interviews were done digitally and recorded on my laptop, allowing me to

quote and reference what interviewees said with a high degree of accuracy. Most of the quoted dialogue in this paper comes from these interviews. Lastly, I conducted a literature review to better understand the existing research done on punk, metal, and the DIY scene. Many social scientists, especially anthropologists and sociologists, have written about these subcultures extensively. From older texts on the origins of the scene to modern ethnographies, there was no shortage of resources for me to engage with.

I feel that ethnographic methods, including my use of participant observation and open-ended interviews, were particularly influential to the findings of this project. Speaking directly with community members allowed my participants to give voice to their own perspectives and experiences. When possible, I tried to use direct quotes from those I interviewed in order to best represent their thoughts. Attending events myself also allowed me to gain firsthand experience that informed my qualitative descriptions.

Going into this ethnography, my position relative to the Richmond underground community was somewhat ambiguous. As someone who had never lived in the city, it would be somewhat apt to label myself as an outsider. However, it's important to acknowledge that I've been interested in punk and metal music for years, and I've had experience in DC's significantly more commercial scene. I additionally recognize that my perspectives were likely altered by my position as a performer at many of the shows that I attended. Performing also may have altered the ways in which others chose to interact with me. Regardless of my opinions on both the music and the practices of this community, I attempted to allow my ethnographic observations to reflect the scene as it is conceptualized by its members, both consciously and unconsciously. Through these

observations I hope that I have created a balanced work that helps to explain the cultural logic behind some of these core ideas and practices.

Underground music subculture has been studied by researchers from the very beginning of these movements. A foundational text in this tradition comes from Dick Hebdige and his book *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (Hebdige, 1979). This text is an examination of some of the earliest modern subcultures to exist in the UK - including mods, skinheads, teddy boys, and of course, punks. Hebdige's work primarily deals with the material causes for these subcultures and the reasons why they arose at the times they did. As a vivid portrait of Britain's underground in the late 70's, It is an interesting and influential text that expanded my understanding of the origins of the punk movement. My project, however, is not an origin story in the way that Hebdige's is. My aim is to give an analysis and interpretation of my immediate, contemporary punk scene as I observe it around me. The historical context provided by Hebdige was influential to my project, but I do not seek to refute or challenge his claims in any significant way.

There are some academic perspectives on punk that I do wish to examine more directly, however. The connection between punk subculture, self-reliance, and a distaste for the corporate mainstream has been discussed for decades now within the academic literature. My observations also lead me to believe that these are key components of what informs DIY practices. However, I feel that previous discourse on the matter has, at times, centered pursuits of individuality that are not reflected in my observations. "Punk Rockers," a 1987 paper by Anthropologist Robert Pomeroy, discusses how self-reliance and anti-corporatism were guiding ideals in the development of early punk subculture in western Michigan. He writes:

> There is a general feeling that [within mainstream society] people are commodities, useful to work in factories and fight wars for the powerful but not capable of thinking for themselves. The solution offered in punk songs is for each to take responsibility for one's own actions, to think intelligently and fulfill one's potential, or die (Pomeroy 1987, 86).

While Pomeroy does identify a rejection of the mainstream as key to punk ideology, his analysis seems to emphasize the personal expression of individuals. Perhaps this was once an important factor in the development of punk ideology, but my research leads me to believe that this is not a primary function of the modern scene. Modern punks and other adherents of DIY culture reject mainstream means of musical production and distribution, but in order to do this they tend to create alternative modes for these practices. The interdependence of DIY venues, labels, and musicians indicates to me that the scene is fundamentally based on a community based, in-group reliance rather than a purely individualistic self-reliance.

Pomeroy's view is made particularly clear in his discussion of anarchism within the punk community. He writes:

> Anarchy is often mentioned as the political philosophy of punk rock. Punks who understand the intellectual traditions and historical development of anarchy, dedicated anarchists, are few in number. For most punks who call themselves anarchists, the word simply means "no rules," licensing them to do whatever they want, including destruction

> of property, hurting people, irresponsible behavior, or causing problems for other punks (Pomeroy 1987, 87).

While Pomeroys findings on the midwest punk scene of the 1980's emphasizes an individualistic, "no rules" attitude, my fieldwork in Richmond from 2023-2024 led me to observe community spaces that have strong sets of rules and customs. While these rules are vastly different from mainstream conventions in how they are codified and executed, their importance in maintaining order within the scene is of the utmost importance. Additionally, the assertion that few punks understand the history or intellectual tradition of anarchism was not borne out in my own observations. As I will discuss, DIY spaces are often vehicles for spreading anarchist literature through the medium of zines. Many bands, including those who self-describe as anarchist, often make references to specific political or social causes. In contrast to Pomeroy, I found the punk scene that I observed to be broadly community oriented, decentralized, and politically conscious.

To demonstrate the various elements of underground music culture that I observed while conducting my ethnographic research, I divided this project into three chapters. The first, titled **Moshing: Simulated Violence and Underground Music**, highlights the physical crowd participation known as moshing to analyze its significance within underground punk and metal spaces. My second chapter, titled **(Sub)Genre: Art and Ideology**, discusses the unique ways in which non-commercial music communities utilize genre terms to describe their art. The final chapter, titled **Infrastructures of Community Self-Reliance** discusses various practices within the underground music community that promote artistic independence from what are perceived

as mainstream music institutions. Throughout these chapters I attempt to describe these practices in detail, and explain how they contribute to a larger subcultural community based on the DIY ethic.

Chapter 1

Moshing: Simulated Violence and Underground Music

Richmond's premier DIY hardcore venue "The Warehouse" is an aptly titled building. This repurposed warehouse sits alongside several nearly identical buildings in the industrial heart of Richmond. Most of the surrounding businesses are empty at this time of night, save for a few restaurants and bars that attempt to transform these buildings into trendy examples of Richmond's nightlife. However, when I visited in February 2023, none of those other destinations were as crowded as The Warehouse, nor did they match the energy of the Warehouse's clientele. That night, New Jersey harcore band Gel had attracted hundreds of concertgoers to this otherwise empty part of the city.

We realized how cramped the venue was as we tried to secure a spot to stand in front of the stage. The music had not yet begun, yet the back of the venue was nearly full of people. Content with our spot for the moment, Max and I stayed back as the openers began to play. I slowly crept my way forward, and as the first opening band finished their set I was able to secure a spot near the front of the stage, towards the left side of the venue. As the second band began to play, it became clear to me why this spot was not taken. Shortly after their set began, arms and legs began to flail from all angles. People began stomping their way from the left of the venue to the right, slamming unapologetically into anyone in the way. I decided to hold my ground - I had been in mosh pits before. This was to be expected at a hardcore show. My attention slowly shifted away from the crowd as I started paying attention to the band on stage. As soon as I had

let my guard down a boot landed squarely on my head as I was kicked from the side. I was dazed, but uninjured. At that point I decided to retreat to my previous position. To this day I don't know who kicked me, or what they looked like. At a hardcore show, the risk of getting hit by a stray Dr. Marten is the price one pays to get close to the stage.

In punk and metal subculture, moshing refers to a variety of forms of physical movement among the crowd at live music events. These usually include physical contact between individuals within the crowd. Contact can range from light pushing and shoving up to punching and kicking, depending on the context of the show. Some forms of moshing are more coordinated than others. Sometimes the musicians will orchestrate the type of moshing present in the crowd, encouraging audiences to run around the venue to create a "circle pit". Other types are started by individuals within the crowd. For the purpose of this project, moshing will refer to any group movement involving physical contact among the audience at a live music event.

In "Direct Action: an Ethnography," anthropologist David Graeber examined the decentralized structures that allowed anarchist activists to organize themselves without a centralized authority. His work describes in great detail the mechanisms of a spokescouncil, a meeting between different activist affinity groups that are used in the planning of various actions. Spokescouncils are notable for their lack of centralized organizers and their adherence to the principles of consensus. Consensus, as Graeber describes it, is a process rather than a means of coming to a decision, in which changes to propositions are freely proposed and discussed without adhering to a simple majority vote. Like the actions of the activists described by Graeber, the logic of the mosh pit is one that embodies a sort of group consensus rather than imposed authority.

Anarchists and moshers are both often perceived as chaotic actors for their rejections of authority. But as I will describe, moshing represents a form of practice that is broadly adhered to without centralized imposition. Through spontaneous, but socially constrained actions, communities are built through trust and shared ideals.

Types of Moshing/Crowd Participation

Moshing is a diverse means of expression that is performed in many ways. Below I included a list of some of the most prominent types of moshing that I have witnessed during shows. This is not an exhaustive list, and others are likely to categorize different forms of expression in different ways. I attempted to connect each type of moshing with the genres I associate with them in order to demonstrate how different genres of music lead to different forms of participation. No type of moshing is fully genre-exclusive, but I attempted to identify trends that arose in my own observations. I also included some forms of physical crowd participation that are not usually considered moshing, such as stage diving and crowd surfing, because I feel that they are similar in purpose and appearance.

Slamming
Characteristics: Running, pushing, body slamming
Associated genres: Hardcore, punk rock, D-Beat, straight edge

This is the primary type of moshing found at Richmond hardcore shows. This type of moshing usually encourages a U-shaped gap in the crowd to form near the stage. This arrangement gives participants plenty of space to move around, striking those standing to either side of the pit.

Two step
Characteristics: Shuffling movement, rocking motion, swinging arms and legs
Associated genres: Straight edge, hardcore, metallic hardcore

This is also very common at hardcore shows, and often encourages the same type of U-shape towards the center of the crowd. Two stepping can happen at any point during a song, but I primarily associate it with the compositional technique known as the “breakdown” - a portion of certain punk and metal songs in which the tempo drops and the rhythms are simplified.

Circle Pit
Characteristics: Large group runs in a circular motion around the venue
Associated genres: Metal, especially thrash and death metal

This type of moshing is most common at medium to large shows at commercial nightclubs. It is not quite as rough as other forms of moshing. The main risk of injury comes from falling over, though participants are usually vigilant enough to pick people off of the ground before they are trampled.

Push Pit
Characteristics: Shoving and pushing in a high density crowd (not swinging/punching/kicking)
Associated genres: Metal, especially thrash and death metal

This is the main form of moshing I associate with metal, though I have also seen it at punk and hardcore shows. This type of moshing often happens in front of the stage in densely populated crowds. This type of pit does not usually cause the U-shaped gap that slamming or two-stepping does.

Skank
Characteristics: Similar to two-step but less aggressive. Swinging arms and shuffling feat. Can be considered a dance.
Associated genres: Ska, especially 2nd and 3rd wave ska

This is arguably not a type of moshing, as physical contact between people is not required during skanking. This dance is primarily associated with ska, a genre of Jamaican popular music that became popular with punks and other youth subcultures during the late 70’s in Britain. Two-stepping evolved out of this style, demonstrating the influence of ska and reggae culture on the early punk movement. (Nicolae, 2014)

Wall of Death
Characteristics: The crowd parts, usually at the command of the band. Both sides then run at each other when the song reaches a particular part.
Associated genres: metal, especially thrash. Any show with a large enough audience.

This form of moshing typically only happens at medium to large nightclub shows. A wall of death rarely forms organically, so intervention from the band is usually the only way for one to form. A wall of death is usually coordinated to a compositional element of the music. The crowd will often part during a slow or quiet section of a song. A sudden shift in tempo or dynamics will then signal when the crowd is to collide together.

Crowdkilling
Characteristics: Any moshing technique targeting people not actively in the pit
Associated genres: Hardcore, especially straight edge

Crowdkilling is mostly regulated to DIY events, as it is rarely tolerated at commercial concert venues. The controversial move is defended by some as a longstanding part of hardcore culture. It is typically understood that standing close to the stage can result in being crowdkilled. Places towards the back of the venue are generally considered to be safe from this type of interaction.

Stage Dive/Crowd Surfing
Characteristics: jumping from stage to be caught by others in audience
Associated genres: All

Stage diving refers to the act of jumping off of the stage. This leads to crowd surfing, the act of being held up by others in the crowd and passed around by a densely packed audience. Crowd surfing can also be initiated by picking up audience members from within the crowd. This type of participation is not limited to heavy music genres, and can be found at many popular music venues.

Head Walk
Characteristics: Stage dive in which diver steps on heads of audience members as they run off of the stage
Associated genres: Hardcore

I have only witnessed headwaling on a few occasions, and each time it was at a hardcore show. Most DIY hardcore shows lack the crowd density for traditional stage diving and crowd surfing. This move usually targets the people standing to the right or left of a U-shaped gap caused by slamming and two stepping.

Community Building

In modern popular music, moshing is usually confined to “heavy” genres of music due to its

roots in the early hardcore punk scene in the United States. The term is often attributed to Paul

Hudson, more commonly known by his stage name of HR (Human Rights), the vocalist of DC band Bad Brains. Many think that Hudson originally referred to this activity as “mashing”, but due to his accent fans interpreted the word as “moshing.” Hudson acquired this accent growing up in Liverpool with a Jamaican mother. (Duncombe 2011, 211)

Moshing’s violent appearance is something that contributes to punk and metal communities having somewhat of an outsider reputation. While some more extreme subgenres of rap and EDM have since picked up the practice as well, moshing is still uncommon at live events for most forms of popular music. In this chapter, I intend to present the reasons that moshing is welcomed within the punk subculture. In my interviews with members of the punk scene, I often asked participants what they felt the appeal of moshing is. One interviewee, my former band mate and William & Mary alumni, Max, said this:

It makes you feel more connected to the music... It's really cathartic. At a certain point, if you really love the music, you're gonna hear the signals. You’re gonna hear parts of the music and before you know it you're jumping [or] you're slamming. It’s like second nature. It’s almost like a Pavlovian response. You hear the pogo drums and you start jumping

Here, Max is referring to the strong connection between moshing and certain compositional elements of punk music. The “pogo drums” that he references are a common musical technique used by hardcore bands. This mid-tempo groove is usually played with the snare drum and low tom, and it indicates that the audience should start moving. As the name implies, pogoing refers to jumping up and down to the rhythm of the music as if one was using a pogo stick. Pogoing is

not exclusive to heavy forms of music, but in punk and metal shows the act will often involve other forms of moshing such as pushing and “slamming”. As Max’s use of the word “Pavlovian” implies, this appears to be a conditioned behavior rather than coordinated action. Once one knows the cues to mosh, moving around becomes a natural response. One usually only picks up on these cues from attending shows and learning through participation.

Another prominent example of this known as a breakdown. Breakdowns include downtempo drums while the guitar and bass plays a syncopated rhythm, usually only using one or two notes. This technique is given an onomatopoeic name - “chugging”. While having its origins in hardcore punk, thrash metal, and grove metal, breakdowns have since found their home in more contemporary genres like metalcore. At metalcore shows, breakdowns often lead to concertgoers punching, kicking, or “windmilling” the air (and sometimes the people) around them.

Ryan Christopher Jones’ article for Anthropology News compares mosh pits to various “circle dances” performed by cultures around the world (Jones 2022). The structure of a circle pit closely resembles that of a hora, a circle dance practiced by many ethnic groups in Eastern Europe. Similar dances are practiced in Native American cultures as well. In these folk traditions, circle dances often hold cosmological significance, but Jones also cites sources that describe them as symbols of brotherhood or unity. Jones emphasizes his personal connection to moshing and describes bursts of emotion that connect the individual with the group and the music all at once.

The way that Jones describes mosh pits is very much in line with my own observations. The way that Max described the connection between musical composition and his own movements give insight into the mental state of a mosher. As Max described, Mosh pits bridge the gap between music and audience. Attending a show becomes an activity rather than entertainment when moshing is involved. Despite the chaotic appearance of the pit, predictable patterns emerge in accordance with the music. In my experience, crowds usually have no difficulty following the music and forming different types of mosh pits along with the progression of the musician's set, without the need for external instruction or verbal communication. When individuals are synchronized with the music, they become synchronized with each other. I see this synchronization as symbolic of a broader phenomenon that occurs at underground shows - the establishment of a participant-driven community based on shared interests and practices.

Systems of Rules for Moshing

Throughout my ethnographic research, many concertgoers referred to a set of "unwritten rules" that govern conduct within the mosh pit. Usually, participants had a general sense of what those rules entailed, but their unwritten nature prevented them from being listed out with any sort of confidence. The most commonly cited rule that often is identified is "If someone falls in the pit, you pick them back up." In my observations, opinions on moshing etiquette vary greatly depending on the context of an event. The rules that govern the pit at a small DIY venue are very different from those at large, professional venues.

In some instances, of course, there are literally written or enumerated rules that determine how people will mosh. Larger shows at commercial venues tend to be careful when it comes to the

issues of liability that can come along with moshing. When I saw the Swedish progressive metal band Meshuggah at The Fillmore, a commercial concert venue in Silver Spring, Maryland, a recorded voice message was played over the loudspeakers before the show began. This announcement informed the audience that moshing and crowd-surfing was not permitted, at risk of being ejected from the show. The announcement was mostly disregarded by the crowd and security alike, as I saw many attendees break the rules without consequence. Still, such announcements are rarely found in DIY venues. The only time I encountered a DIY venue with a restrictive moshing policy was at a small, newly established house venue in Woodbridge, VA. When trying to enforce rules surrounding moshing, the venue owner was not only disregarded, but met with immediate mockery from the crowd, leading to a verbal confrontation between the owner and a fan who found the regulation laughable. While in both instances the rules were disregarded, the formal regulation was more expected in a commercial context. People within the DIY scene have come to expect that moshing is regulated by the crowd itself rather than an external, authoritative force. Such impositions are usually met with open hostility from the crowd.

Concerns over external control over the behavior of show attendees extends beyond just moshing. While at a hardcore show at OSB, a DIY venue in Richmond, all patrons were asked to show their ID at the door. This was an all ages show, so this was presumably to mark individuals under the age of 21 to prevent them from consuming alcohol in the venue (OSB does not serve alcohol but it does allow outside beverages.) While I did not think much of this at the time, one disgruntled man in his mid 30's was very vocal about his discontent with this arrangement. He started speaking to my friend and I, asking if we had been carded and explaining that it wasn't

right for a punk show to have that type of rule. Such rules are usually expected at commercial venues, most of which serve alcohol and therefore are particularly cognisant of legal concerns related to underage drinking. DIY venues are unique social environments in that regulations which would be common at commercial venues are met with extreme skepticism.

Divisions and Consequences

In May 2023, Straitjacket traveled from William & Mary to Norfolk, VA to play a show at The Taphouse Grill. This restaurant and bar is located across the street from a Fresh Market, one of the few organic grocery stores in the area. It features a full food and beverage menu, including an impressive selection of craft beers and vegan burgers. The eating areas are dim with atmospheric lighting. The walls are decorated with vinyl records and stained hardwood. On an average day the taphouse would likely garner a clientele of thrifty foodies and microbrew connoisseurs. But that night the bar would be serving a different community of Tidewater residents. This bar is a central music venue for the Norfolk hardcore community.

The show was being put on by Not for the Weak records, Norfolk's most prominent DIY punk label. Max was the one who worked to get us on the lineup, utilizing the connections he had been building in the DIY community for the past few years to get us shows in the area around our school. We were set to play first, followed by three other bands from the Richmond and Norfolk areas. We borrowed amplifiers and drums from the other bands and took the checker-patterned stage to play our set. We played to a relatively small crowd of about 20 people, who remained still as we played every song we had ever written, totaling about 15 minutes. Whether it was due to our lack of experience or our lack of recognizability to the Norfolk scene, the crowd was not

compelled to mosh by our set. Cicada played second, delivering a fast-paced and brief set that lasted only 6 minutes. This group was formed by members of various other Richmond bands only months prior, but their music appealed to the crowd in a way our's simply did not. A mosh pit started early into their brief set among a few audience members.

The next two sets were performed by Norfolk-based bands with releases out on Not For the Weak Records. As such, their inclusion on the lineup seemed to be the main draw that evening. As Self-inflict took the stage, the venue began to fill with people. By the time they began to play, nearly 100 people had crowded into the small gastropub to hear these bands. As the crowd grew, so too did the mosh pit. Reckoning Force, a legendary band in the local Norfolk Scene, was last to play. Their set resulted in an impressive mosh pit that filled a significant portion of the venue. Their blisteringly fast brand of hardcore punk was clearly designed to elicit this reaction from the crowd. One moment from this performance in particular stood out to me as indicative of some of the divisions that exist within the punk community and their attitudes towards moshing.

The moment in question happened shortly after Reconing Force began playing their final song. A man wearing a baseball cap and flannel shirt stepped on stage and grabbed the microphone out of the vocalist's hand mid-verse. He then began waving his hand to the musicians to indicate that they should stop playing. After cutting them off, he pointed at an individual within the crowd and began speaking to him through the microphone. I was there for the entire interaction, though I referenced a recording of the show captured by The iPhone Archivist and uploaded to his YouTube channel (Valencia 2023, 13:40-16:25). This allowed me to accurately transcribe the dialogue from this event.

Man: Hey hey... we're not over here mocking coming out on a Saturday night, fucking drinking our fucking selves to death! Don't come in here mocking what the fuck we do!

Many people from the crowd were irritated by this outburst. They began yelling at the man for interrupting the set. He dropped the microphone and walked offstage.

Vocalist: (picking up the mic) I don't know what he said but let's go…

Drummer: (to Vocalist) [inaudible]

Vocalist: oh, he was fucking with people? Hey don't fuck with anybody. Yeah. What's happening? Can we play our songs? Shit. Jesus. Hey guys, everybody be nice. Hey, let's not hate each other. Let lets... come on. If anybody's being a shithead dancer you can go ahead and get out of here. We're gonna play our last song... then we can fuck off.

Vocalist (To man) What's the guy? What happened?

Man: [inaudible]... fuck that shit.

Vocalist: If you're dancing like an asshole, you can go ahead and go home. But if you're dancing like a guy who's having fun...or a lady...or anything else...

Drummer: (begins playing)

Vocalist: We've just got one more.

The man in the baseball cap was attempting to call attention to an older man who appeared to be in his late fifties. It is not uncommon to see people of this age at shows, but this man was dressed in such a way that indicated he was likely not involved in the local punk scene. I had noticed him bouncing around the mosh pit as well, though I didn't think much of his presence until the younger man stepped on stage. He did appear to be intoxicated, as the younger man had suggested after taking the microphone. While the younger man was on stage, the older man had awkwardly laid down on the ground, as if to hide himself away from the attention.

After that, the show continued as usual. Reckoning force played their last song and the show ended. After that, the interrupter stepped back on stage and argued with a few audience members who were near the front of the venue in an attempt to defend himself. One woman was particularly irritated with him and attempted to shove him. Others broke up the confrontation quickly.

This moment highlights how members of the community view the act of moshing differently. There is no doubt that the older man was unaccustomed to this type of environment. His movement was notably more dance-like than the other moshers, likely influenced by his obviously intoxicated state. The man in the baseball hat felt that the community as a whole was being disrespected or "mocked" by an outsider who, by his assessment, was moshing improperly.

The majority of the crowd seemed to disagree. Most were irritated by the interruption of the show, but the crowd also seemed genuinely indifferent to the older man's way of moshing.

In the DIY community, and especially at hardcore shows, notions of respect can be quite different from those in mainstream society. Reconing Force's vocalist's message to the crowd was ultimately one that attempted to encourage order and mend divisions among the audience. However, his way of doing this would appear crass and vulgar to outsiders. Calling an audience member an "asshole" or "shithead" was not intended to provoke that person, but rather to direct people towards bad behavior while maintaining the irreverent attitude that is often expected of punks. His use of gender-inclusive language ("guy, or lady, or anything else") also suggests that respect of sexual and gender minorities is broadly valued within the community. Even so, this line was also delivered in a nonchalant manner.

Based on their clothing and actions, I speculate that the man in the baseball cap is a member of the straight edge community. Straight edge is a hardcore punk subculture that rejects the use of drugs and alcohol. Adherents of straight edge are known for wearing simple, masculine clothing that leans away from the more colorful and extreme fashion trends of previous punk movements. Short, undyed hair, and tattoos are also characteristic of this subculture. His focus on the man who was "drinking himself to death" suggests a strong aversion to the older man's intoxicated antics. This behavior would still be unusual for most straight edge people that I have met and talked to - most seem to view straight edge as a personal choice related to physical and mental health.

In my interview with Walter of iPhone Archivist, he had this to say about the unwritten rules of moshing:

> You know how it is with moshing. You do your thing, but pick up the person who falls and everything's alright. Moshing was never meant to be malicious - unless you make it that way, and then the reactions that happen come as a result of it.

He then recalled a story of how, at a Richmond show, an audience member repeatedly hit a vocalist while they were performing. This resulted in other members of the crowd ganging up and "kicking the crap" out of that audience member. This story was told as if it was not particularly unusual in his experience of the scene. I got the impression that Walter viewed this type of retribution as an expected consequence of interrupting a show.

Walter's story somewhat complicates my previous characterizations of moshing. I previously described moshing as a form of "simulated violence." By this I mean that, in almost all cases, the intent of moshing is not to hurt people. This was clear to me as soon as I began observing and participating in moshing when I attended large, commercial metal shows as a teenager. What surprised me when I started attending underground shows is how frequently real violence can follow from the simulation. As Walter notes, the expectation is that nobody goes in with the intent to hurt somebody. But if somebody pushes the envelope or disrupts the regular functioning of the show, genuine physical confrontation is not uncommon.

A good example of this type of behavior came from a show I attended at one of Richmond's most prominent DIY venues, The Warehouse. While the band "Killing Pace" was performing, the music cut out for reasons that were not clear at first. There appeared to be some sort of disturbance close to the stage that caused the band to stop. I later found out that there had been a fight. When I asked a member of the crowd what caused the disturbance, he simply said it was only "pit beef", casually dismissing the event as nothing unusual.

At a later show at the same venue, I spoke to Marcus[1], a longtime community member and guitarist for a Richmond-based hardcore band. I then found out that Marcus was involved in the confrontation. I later asked him about the event in an interview.

"I was with a friend that night who hadn't really gone to many hardcore shows. This one guy in particular just kept swinging at him for some reason, so he just kind of felt targeted. I think my friend either hit him back or just kicked him out of the way or something. The guy took offense to that and confronted him. They kind of stared each other down for a little bit. Someone tried to break it up but the guy ended up headbutting my friend. Once that happened me and a couple other people just kind of piled on top of the guy and started beating at him, I guess - just cuz violence at hardcore shows isn't cool. Someone eventually broke it up, though. I don't think anyone got seriously hurt or anything, they just kind of broke it up and told them to knock it off or they'd get kicked out."

[1] While this interviewee agreed to use his real name in the paper, I decided it was best to use a pseudonym due to the nature of the following passage.

Marcus' story highlights how notions of order and justice operate within the punk community. Like commercial venues, DIY venues are privately owned. Where DIY venues differ is their lack of permanent staff or bureaucracy. These venues typically do not have security or enumerated lists of rules for conduct during shows. As a result, behavior that would never be allowed at large club venues is commonplace in DIY spaces. Marijuana and outside alcohol are freely consumed at most venues, moshing and stage diving is unregulated, and some amount of fighting is tolerated. I say "some amount" is tolerated because I have witnessed some notable exceptions. I do not mean to say that people with authority never step in to discourage destructive behavior. Marcus' confrontation was eventually stopped by someone with authority in the venue. Neither he nor I could tell exactly who it was who broke up the fight, though it could have been the venue owner or person taking cash at the door. At a different Warehouse show audience members were dangling from thin pipes that ran along the ceiling and metal chains attached to those pipes. The pipes buckled from the weight of those participants, threatening to burst. Upon seeing this, a voice came over the loudspeaker, (presumably the man running sound for the show) asking people to refrain from climbing on the ceiling. This was met with reluctant compliance.

Retributive action is a decentralized pursuit for punks. Calling out perceived bad behavior is something that anyone can do within the scene, if they are willing to face pushback. Marcus' friend took that risk when he confronted the rogue mosher. After his friend was attacked, a group of others stepped in to resolve the situation with force. This collective action, perhaps counterintuitively, did result in the reestablishment of order without the involvement of any official enforcement. When asked if anyone left or was removed from the venue after the confrontation, Marcus said this:

It doesn't look like anyone left [the show]. From what I remember, him and my friend just kind of squashed it right then and there and it wasn't really brought up again. It's unfortunate stuff like that can happen at hardcore shows sometimes, but I guess it comes with the territory.

When the simulation breaks down and moshing gives way to real violence, that violence is handled differently than it is in mainstream society. To Marcus, this confrontation was an unfortunate, but effective way of resolving the conflict between his friend and the rogue mosher. It makes sense that the physical nature of the mosh pit would lead to such confrontations. What I find more interesting is how casually such events are dismissed. To regulars at Richmond punk shows, a physical fight can be explained simply as "pit beef" or "squashing it." It is not a desired aspect of the mosh pit, but it is an omnipresent possibility that is, to community members, not particularly alarming or damaging in the long term.

Spontaneity and Order - Final Thoughts

Like the anarchist practice of "direct action" described by David Graeber (Graeber 2008), Moshing is an organized, but decentralized group action. Through the apparent chaos and violence of the pit, a clear order emerges. Participants are expected to understand and follow the "unwritten rules" while adhering to the expected forms of moshing at the type of show they are attending. This order is not perpetual - disruptions and disagreements are relatively frequent. The community, however, has equally decentralized and spontaneous ways of dealing with those seen as bad actors. In lieu of centralized authorities at DIY venues, retributive action becomes the responsibility of regular members of the crowd. While this may erupt into actual violence at

times, the intention of fighting is still to “squash the beef” and produce a lasting order that allows the show to persist. These retributive practices, along with the previously established “unwritten rules” of the mosh pit demonstrate organic, community driven structures. I view the insistence on maintaining these community driven structures rather than imposed, top-down systems of rules as a direct reflection of the DIY ethic. The underground community demonstrates a strong desire to govern itself and construct an alternative culture in which moshing can be enjoyed without such regulations.

In my final chapter, I will further explain the connections between anarchism and punk subculture. Unsurprisingly, many punks identify as anarchists and vice-versa. I feel that the insistence on DIY spaces maintaining this distance from centralized authority is, at least in part, due to this political tendency of the community. In my next chapter, I will continue to discuss the ways that communities are created and maintained through the discussion of subgenres. Like moshing, shared ideas about genre conventions help to unify, and often divide, underground music communities.

Chapter 2

(Sub)Genre: Art and Ideology

If I had to break down the three microgenres of punk that do well in this area, it would be that Straight Edge, New York style sound, the crusty d-beat style, and that chaotic grind-y punk sound. Those are the three that are popular

-Walter of Iphone Archivist

Underground music communities will often have a large shared vocabulary for the descriptions of musical styles. The classifications genre, subgenre, and microgenre serve as the primary categorizations for these different styles. The term “genre” is of course used to describe many types of music, from contemporary popular music to classical and baroque styles. Genres are the broadest of the three classifications, terms which give a brief impression of the instrumentation and composition of the music. Subgenres are a more niche and specific style of music that fits within a broader genre category. In my experience, discussions of subgenres are particularly important in heavy music cultures such as punk and metal, where discourse over the origins of particular sounds frequently dominate the conversation. Microgenres are essentially sub-subgenres, with even more particular sound profiles and greater niche appeal. For example, Metal is a broad genre category, consisting of the smaller subgenre of black metal. A microgenre that falls under black metal is the hyper-specific style known as depressive/suicidal black metal. There is often great disagreement over the boundaries of each of these three categories. Because metal as a musical style is derivative of rock & roll, it is often argued that metal is itself a

subgenre of rock. Additionally, some people do not distinguish between the subgenre and microgenre level, instead referring to all derivative styles under a genre as subgenres.

Within the academic discourse, discussions of genre are often done in the context of linguistic or literary genre. In his paper, "Genre, Intertextuality, and Social Power," linguistic anthropologist Charles Briggs drew on the work of Hermann Gossen to describe linguistic genre as "locally constituted and systemically interrelated." (Briggs 1992, 139) Modern linguistic anthropologists usually understand linguistic genres to be defined by the communities that use them, rather than imposed by external authorities (such as Western colonial powers.) Like linguistic genres, musical genres are utilized to vastly different ends by those who create and maintain them. DIY music, by its nature, is oriented around non-commercial means of music production. This leads the communities that adhere to DIY to utilize genre for a variety of purposes not seen within the mainstream. Whether those goals are musical, aesthetic, or ideological, genre and subgenre become part of a shared vocabulary that helps establish and subdivide communities based on those goals.

Walters' quote from our interview points out three particular punk "microgenres" that he sees as particularly important to the Richmond/Tidewater scene. The first is straight edge, which, as he points out, traces its origins to the early New York hardcore scene. This style incorporates metal-influenced guitar riffing to the established hardcore sound. The straight edge subculture is primarily known for its opposition to the use of alcohol and recreational drugs. The second is crust punk/d-beat. While technically two different subgenres, these styles share much of the same characteristics and origins. Both are fast, aggressive forms of hardcore punk that trace their

stylistic origins to the early 80's European scene. D-beat refers to a particular type of drum beat popularized by the UK band Discharge. Crust punks and fans of d-beat are known for their distinctive manner of dress, which includes studded black denim jackets and pants covered in hand-sewn patches. The final subgenre Walter mentions in the quote is grindcore. This subgenre sits on the border of death metal and hardcore punk. It combines the short and direct song structures of punk with the gory and shocking aesthetics of death metal. The result is perhaps the most noisy and extreme subgenre of the three.

My observations align with Walter's characterization of the scene. I have seen bands of these three microgenres play live in and around Richmond on multiple occasions, and advertisements for these types of shows are the among the most frequently posted on social media. The common trend between these three is that they all are in some way derived from hardcore punk, often shortened to "hardcore". I observe that the vast majority of heavy and underground music in Richmond is, in some way, derivative of hardcore. Even subgenres that are not usually associated with hardcore, often take influence from hardcore if they are based in Richmond. An excellent example of this is the band Prisoner. On a poster advertising one of their shows, they were described as "industrial hardcore metal. " Industrial metal is a somewhat common subgenre of metal, but the inclusion of hardcore punk elements is a unique aspect that I feel is likely due to the broader influence of hardcore punk that permeates most of the Richmond scene. Even bands that fully self-describe as metal will often share concert billings with hardcore punk bands. In many ways, hardcore is the cornerstone subgenre of the Richmond underground scene, and elements of hardcore culture are present in nearly all other subgenres performed in the city.

Race and Genre in Mainstream Music

At first glance, the purpose of genre appears obvious: It gives the consumer an idea of what to expect from their music. There are no fixed parameters for what constitutes these genres. The label only indicates a loose categorization of related rhythms, instrumentation, vocal themes, etc. With no objective boundaries of categorization, genre becomes a fluid form of categorization that can be used towards drastically different ends. The formation of a genre is fundamentally a social, cultural, and economic process. Genre can therefore be seen as a set of agreed upon musical traits that can be categorized accordingly. I argue that genre takes on radically different meanings and utilities in underground versus mainstream music. Still, genre labels are a constant source of disagreement and debate in both the underground and the mainstream.

A primary example of the influence of social conditions on the development of genre labels can be seen in the early days of rock & roll. Rock music would become the dominant force in popular music in the mid to late 20th century, later fragmenting into the countless genres that still dominate mainstream and underground music today, including both punk and metal. But, like all art, rock & roll was itself derivative of previous artforms - especially blues music. Researcher Paul Linden argues that the blues had to be "reborn" in order to appeal to a white mainstream audience. His article "Race, Hegemony, and the Birth of Rock & Roll" takes this terminology from blues musician Muddy Water's 1977 song "The Blues Had a Baby and They Named it Rock & Roll." Linden found the idea of "rebirth" to be a particularly apt description of the shift from blues to rock, though he felt that terms like "subsumption" and "appropriation" are also crucial to the discourse. One of the many reasons such terms are used is the early rock & roll practice of white musicians covering songs by Black artists. This practice resulted in songs that

were much more commercially successful due to the racist prejudices of the majority white population of 1950's America. Black musical contributions were therefore only able to enter the white mainstream by being reborn, subsumed, or appropriated, depending on the framing one prefers (Linden 2012, 43-67).

This period of music history demonstrates a traditional use of genre in mainstream music. Blues, a genre predominantly made by and for Black people in the early 1900's was renamed and transformed in order to sell records to a nation grasped by white hegemony. Similar racial genre boundaries can be seen today, with some new developments. Contemporary Black music genres such as rap and R&B now appeal to white audiences on a broader scale than the blues did in the 1950's. Still, many artists express their discontent with the rigid racial boundaries that genre can demand. Famously, musician Tyler the Creator spoke out about such restrictive genre conventions after winning the award for best rap album at the 62nd Grammy awards for his album "IGOR." He expressed mixed feeling over winning the award, stating:

It sucks that whenever we, and I mean guys that look like me, do anything that's genre bending they always put it in a 'rap' or 'urban' category - and I don't like that 'urban' word. It's just a politically correct way to say the n-word to me. So when I hear that, I'm like, why can't we just be in pop?... Half of me feels like the rap nomination was a backhanded compliment. (Okonma, Tyler 2020, 0:30-1:01)

While Black music is now widely successful among a multiracial audience, the impact of the rigid, racialized genre terms of the past continue to be used to categorize musicians along racial

lines. This is also the case in underground genres derivative of rock music. Punk, a subcultural derivative of rock music, is a genre associated primarily with white musicians and audiences. Dick Hebdige's discussion of early British subculture in his book *Subculture, the Meaning of Style* complicates this association by highlighting the influence of Black culture in the formation of white subcultures. He especially focuses on the influence of Rastafarian culture and reggae music on the development of punk music in the late 1970's. It is also impossible to ignore the influence of Black bands such as Bad Brains and Death in the development of the American punk scene. Still, the majority of people who identify as punk continue to be white. Metal, another derivative of rock music, has also long been a predominantly white genre. It is within these predominantly white, underground music communities that I find genre to take on an unusual role when compared to mainstream music.

Genre in Underground Music

In non-commercial music communities, marketing is clearly not the driving factor behind the creation of new genre labels. Music is created by independent bands for niche audiences. As a result, the preferences and prejudices of the broader public aren't considered. As a result, niche subgenre labels become common, even desirable to many bands. These subgenre labels act as a way of indicating the artistic intentions of a small subculture. Different communities utilize genres for different purposes. As a result, genre becomes a complex and fluid signifier that takes on a variety of different uses.

Sometimes subgenres or microgenres are formed around predominantly ideological goals. The previously mentioned "straight edge" subgenre is a prime example of this. Straight edge lyrics

are much more intelligible than other genres under the hardcore banner. As a result, the message of the lyrics is made clear. In addition to the anti-establishment lyrics common in all punk genres, straight edge songs often enumerate the virtues of abstaining from recreational drug use. These lyrical themes become a main distinguishing factor for the subgenre. Likewise, the anarcho-punk movement of the late 70's was an early punk subgenre to use its musical platform to promote anarchist values. (McKay, 2019) In both cases, the music is linked to the ideology. I once asked Max, who identifies with the straight edge movement, if there were any bands who played in a straight edge style but who did not support the lifestyle. He told me that such a band would not qualify as straight edge and that it would not be acceptable for them to adopt the genre label. Similarly, I expect that anarcho-punks would not take kindly to a band playing in the anarcho-punk style while advocating for a different political ideology.

In other contexts, subgenres are often formed around an artistic goal. Within heavy music, extremity is one of the oldest and most common goals. "Extremity" can mean different things to different people, and as a result, there are dozens of different subgenres that each approach the ideal of extremity by different means. The pursuit of extremity is present in many underground genres, including noise, punk, and electronic music. I, however, particularly associate it with metal and its long history of sonic boundary pushing.

The history of metal is in many ways a series of developments in the extremity of the music that eventually branched off into distinct subgenres. In the 1970's, Black Sabbath, often cited as the first heavy metal band, pushed the boundaries of rock and roll towards new extremes in volume, distortion, and subject matter. Metal then became more extreme as bands welcomed influences

from the emerging hardcore punk scene by the early 80's (Kahn-Harris 2007). This led to the emergence of a new subgenre - thrash metal. Thrash upped the tempo of metal and created a new style of palm-muted guitar riffing that would become influential across other metal subgenres. By the 1990's, black metal and death metal were developed as bands continued to create new and intense sounds. (Galbraith 2024) Death metal introduced growled vocals and an increasingly gory visual aesthetic while black metal attempted to create a dark, cold, and atmospheric form of metal through its use of tremolo picked guitars and high pitched vocals.

The schism between black and death metal in their approach of attaining musical extremity has been replicated many times by increasingly more niche subgenres. Like thrash, many of these subgenres take influence from both punk and metal. While punk and metal are usually viewed as distinct genres, it is undeniable that their history is highly interrelated. In many ways, new punk subgenres and microgenres followed a similar trajectory of metal, with both punk and metal adopting an increased focus on extremity as time went on. Punk started less than a decade after metal, adopting its use of power chords but rejecting its flashier and occult-influenced imagery for the more a stripped-back style grounded in the discussion of social issues and personal struggles. It's movement towards extremity began in the late 70's when bands like Black Flag and Bad Brains pioneered the hardcore punk subgenre. From there, d-beat, straight edge, grindcore, and many other genres followed. (DIY Conspiracy 2022) Because both genres were developing towards extremity at the same time, metal and punk constantly borrowed from each other and influenced the other's development. It can sometimes be difficult to say whether a subgenre/microgenre is more aligned with punk or metal, especially as genres become more extreme (grindcore in particular is influenced so greatly by both punk and metal that it does not

fit neatly into either camp.) Even as lines between punk and metal music become blurred, there are still many key distinctions in the cultures that surround each genre.

Cultural Differences Between Metal and Punk Communities

When I heard the news that The Warehouse was offering a show with a lineup of only metal bands, I jumped at the opportunity to go. Metal was my first introduction to heavy music, something that I had discovered in high school. Unfortunately, for much of my college experience, I had no means of attending metal shows. When Max began driving me to Richmond DIY shows, he was interested in hardcore punk almost exclusively. The Richmond DIY scene primarily serves a punk audience, and the Warehouse is no exception. I had seen several bands play at the Warehouse at this point, but all of them were some variety of hardcore punk. In contrast, this lineup was to feature a variety of metal subgenres, including black metal, industrial metal, and brutal death metal.

As Voarm, the first band on the lineup, was performing their soundcheck, it was clear that their set was going to be very different from what the DIY punk community had to offer. Bones decorated both the stage and the performers. Incense smoke emanated from animal skulls that sat in front of the drum set, while smaller bones dangled from the guitarist's necklace. The vocalist was holding what appeared to be an entire spinal column over his shoulder. Each member was dressed entirely in black, including a dark executioner hood that covered their faces. One of the musicians had dozens of six-inch spikes protruding from his guitar strap. Without hearing them play a single note, I knew that this was a black metal band.

Voarm's visual presentation makes clear one of the key differences between punk and metal - the level of theatrical elements. Black metal in particular is notorious for its bold and performative aesthetic. The occult and fantasy themes of metal have often earned the genre the reputation for storytelling and escapism. These themes are rare in punk, where real world social issues are often at the center of attention. Voarm's theatrical elements became all the more clear as they began their set. The band played songs with long, winding structures and complicated instrumental passages with minimal repetition. Lengthy song intros and frequent tonal shifts in the music created a thick, heavy atmosphere that washed over the stationary crowd. Overtone-rich throat singing gave parts of the set a ritualistic, almost religious quality. The audience began to applaud at two different moments during the show, but we were instantly cut off by the vocalist with a concise "shut the fuck up!" This was the only stage banter during the set - there were no political messages, no jokes, and no song dedications. Everything the band did projected mystery, detachment, and seriousness. They did not break character, even after the lights went on and the set was over.

Explaining this distinct aesthetic requires some context on the particular circumstances of Black metal's development. Black metal is a stylistically diverse subgenre with a long and complicated history. It emerged in the 1980's as thrash metal bands began incorporating occult (and often "satanic") imagery into their music. (Kahn-Harris 2007, 4) Initially, black metal was primarily defined by its imagery and vocal themes rather than distinct musical differences. The subgenre became musically distinct in the early 90's as the Norwegian scene developed a more atmospheric and low fidelity sound that would become known as second-wave black metal. The

low production value of this genre is reminiscent of some DIY punk music, which also made use of home recording equipment and non-professional recording spaces. It was at this point that the characteristic tremolo picked guitars and blast-beat drumming emerged as the defining characteristics of black metal musicianship. Black metal vocals also began to develop their own character at this point, with an emphasis on chanting and high pitched screams. From this template, numerous black metal microgenres would emerge. “Atmospheric black metal” and “depressive/suicidal black metal” would emphasize the spacy, atmospheric elements that were attained through low fidelity recordings while “war metal” would stick to the aggressive and high speed trends of thrash and death metal. Other bands would incorporate folk melodies and instrumentation, leading to numerous bands with regional stylings throughout Europe and the United States.

It is difficult to discuss this era of metal without also addressing the violence that soon became prominent in this early black metal scene. The Norwegian scene included projects like Mayhem, Emperor and Burzum, who are now infamous for their histories of violent and criminal behavior. These initial bands would also result in the subgenre’s reputation for far-right extremism, with many members of the scene holding explicitly fascist and white-nationalist political views. Members of these early bands became well-known for high profile crimes, including church burnings and multiple murders (Phillipov 2015). This association would lead to the development of a nazi-alligned microgenre known as NSBM: national socialist black metal. (Buesnell 2020) These negative associations have sparked resistance movements. RABM: red and anarchist black metal is an explicitly left-wing take on the subgenre, often including elements of hardcore and

crust punk into music with antifascist lyrics and imagery. Many apolitical bands have also taken steps to distance themselves from the genre's more fascistic subsections.

While Voarm made no specific appeal to politics during their set, further research reveals that their label is outspoken in advocating for progressive social issues. Forcefield records, which released Voarm's self-titled album in 2019, makes a statement in support of Black Lives Matter on their website's home page. The new section of their site details how proceeds from some of their releases had gone to a variety of progressive causes, including the Richmond Bail Fund. This, combined with the antifacist "three arrows" tattoo worn by the band's bassist suggest to me that Voarm is not affiliated with the right wing of the Black metal community. This makes a lot of sense when one considers the scene that Voarm operates in. DIY venues, especially those affiliated with punk like the warehouse, often refuse to book fascist or fascist-adjacent bands. The same goes for DIY labels. While some metal scenes do tolerate fascism, the Richmond DIY scene is broadly united against such influences. As a result, any show booked at the Warehouse or a similar venue is unlikely to attract a far-right crowd.

While some metal bands embody the DIY ethic, many do not. While both metal and punk have seen moments of mainstream success throughout their histories, metal has consistently reinvented its' sound in a way that appealed to mainstream sensibilities. This is most apparent in the hair/glam metal boom of the 80s, but it is also reflected in the "nu metal" era of the 90's and 2000's. (Kahn-Harris 2007) To a lesser extent, metalcore and deathcore have continued to keep metal relevant to the mainstream music industry through to the present day. In many ways,

extreme genres like black and death metal are reactions to this trend. They act as attempts to keep metal both obscure and sonically challenging.

The majority of black metal, which still includes elements of home recording and underground distribution, do not fit cleanly into my punk-oriented understanding of the DIY ethic. Black metal projects are often more isolated from each other and fail to form a community in the same way that punks do. This is epitomized by the phenomena of the “one-man” black metal project, in which the performance and recording of all instruments is done by one (usually male) person. This style of production was popularized by former Mayhem bassist and convicted murderer Varg Vikernes, who formed the one-man project Burzum. The online era has made releasing and promoting this type of music particularly easy, without the need for live shows or in-person interactions to grant attention to one’s project. I think that this type of solitude and lack of strong, in-person communities is something that perpetuates the far-right tendencies of the black metal movement. In contrast, the political and social tendencies of punk make DIY structures an ideal means for the distribution of punk music. As my next chapter will explore, DIY tendencies are often motivated by left-wing, anticapitalist sentiments.

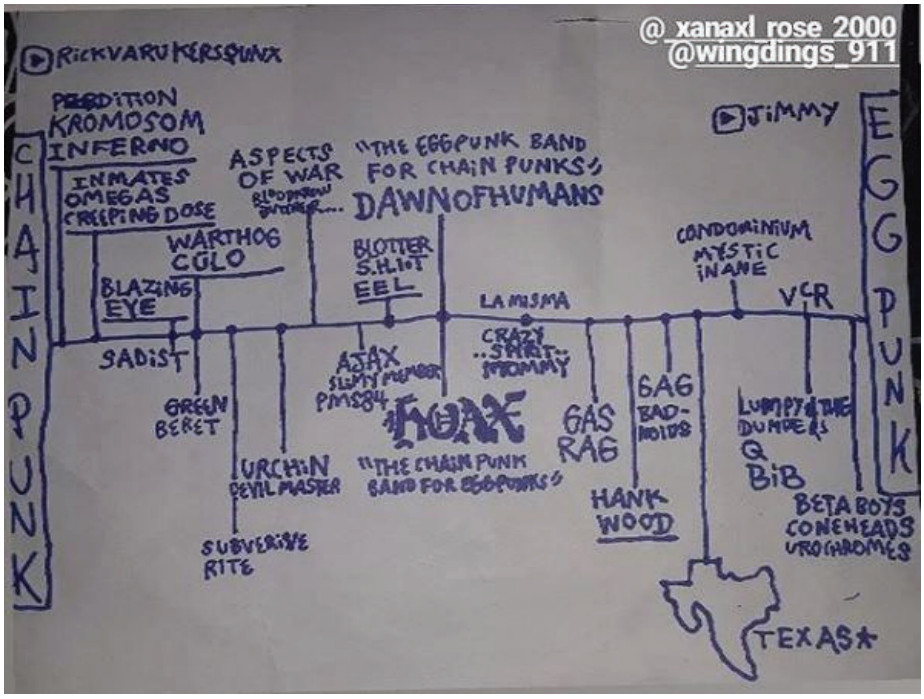
“Egg punk” - Genre and Digital Irony

The internet provides an unprecedented forum for the spread of genre discussion. One consequence of the digitalization of underground music culture is the influence of memes on music discourse, and even the music itself. The impact of ironic internet humor on the underground music scene is exemplified by the “chain punk/egg punk” discourse.

Meme analysis is a growing research method used by social scientists in order to better understand the ways in which digital forms of communication change cultural landscapes. Memes are, in this context, humorous images shared on social media and internet forums. Memes often manifest as variations of phrases or image templates. Any discourse that takes place online is susceptible to being represented in meme form. The impact of memes on political discourse is particularly well studied. Anthropologists Annastiina Kallius and Rik Adriaans recent article “The Meme Radar: Locating Liberalism in Illiberal Hungary" (2022) examines meme culture’s political implications under Hungary’s authoritarian rule. This article also demonstrates the worldwide use of memes as means of building and challenging identities. My comparatively scaled-back implementation of meme analysis is directed at online genre discourse, and how memes influence ideas about subgenres and the aesthetic qualities of music. The impact of ironic internet humor on the underground music scene is exemplified by the “chain punk/egg punk” discourse.

According to the “Egg Punk vs Chain Punk” article on KnowYourMeme.com, the terms “chain punk” and “egg punk” originated in 2017 before reaching a broader popularity in 2018. These terms describe aesthetic and musical trends in contemporary underground punk. (KnowYourMeme, 2018) Chain punk describes bands that conform to traditional punk fashion and aesthetics. Bands are labeled as such if they attempt to portray themselves as dark and serious, with minimal use of color. Chain punk is notably more violent in its imagery and messaging. In contrast, egg punk describes a more colorful and cartoonish aesthetic. Crude, childlike album art, synthesizers, and nasal vocals characterize this style of music.

In 2017, instagram user @memelifecrew posted the first known image to depict the chain/egg dichotomy. The image utilizes a popular meme format featuring two still images of Peter Parker as played by Toby Maguire in Spiderman (2002.) The meme calls attention to a perceived change in the imagery of contemporary punk. The imagery and fashion choices in the top two panels are more typical of punk aesthetics historically, especially the chains and studded accessories. The bottom two panels appear to be a hyperbolic representation of the more colorful and unusual aesthetics of certain modern bands.



In 2018 @xanaxyl_rose_2000 on instagram created this hand-drawn meme chart explaining the egg/chain distinction. The graph maps contemporary bands as either egg punk or chain punk along a singular axis. Bands like Q, BIB, and Coneheads make up the "egg punk" end of the spectrum while Kromosom and Inmates are among the most "chain punk" of the bunch. At this point, these bands were not yet using the terms to describe their sound. Later bands influenced by coneheads and Q would begin referring to their music as "egg punk" after similar memes became more widespread.

Reddit user HelmetTheDictator posted this meme to r/punkmemes in 2023. Here the distinction between egg and chain punk is further abstracted. Former Soviet General Secretary Joseph Stalin is labeled as chain punk while his political rival, Leon Trotsky, is labeled as egg punk. I expect that this meme is deliberately confusing, even to people who are familiar with egg/chain punk. Perhaps it is a commentary on the institutionalist and authoritarian nature of Stalin's governance versus the perceived alternative form of socialism proposed by Trotsky. Or perhaps it is more of an aesthetic comparison between the military attire of Stalin in the first photo as opposed to Trotsky's more disheveled, intellectual appearance. Notably, this meme requires a great deal of prior knowledge for the reader to understand. The reader is expected to know both about the egg/chain distinction while also being able to recognize the two figures from soviet history. Both of these aspects contribute to its niche quality.

What is notable about these early memes is that they categorize bands that already fit into genre labels. Despite the humorous and unserious categorization provided by these memes, Egg punk would soon become a genre label of its own. This genre term was frequently used to retroactively describe a group of bands that started creating music in the early 2010's from the midwest such as The Coneheads, Uranium Club, and Lumpy and the Dumpers. These bands were notable for their high pitched, nasal vocals and prominent use of synthesizer. This sound was sometimes called DEVOcore, due to the clear influence from the 80's new wave band DEVO, but the style was not very well known and the name was not widely adopted. After the popularization of chain/egg punk memes, the label was quickly applied to these bands. (The second image shows the Coneheads as on the entirely egg punk part of the spectrum.) It was not long before bands started releasing music that was self described as Egg Punk. The trend is no longer regional, as Egg punk scenes now appear around the world. Australia has proven to be a particularly prolific egg punk scene with bands such as Gee Tee, Research Reactor Corp, and Tee Vee Repairmann.

Of the two labels, the term "egg punk" seems to be more commonly used by bands to self-describe their music. Prior to beginning fieldwork for this project, I thought that the term "chain punk" was almost never used as a genre term. However, in preparation for an interview with Toxitolerant guitarist Julian, I discovered that "chain punk" was listed as a tag on Toxitolerant's bandcamp page. He explained that chain punk is, to him, a modern continuation of traditional punk subgenres like d-beat. Because he and his bandmates were attempting to invoke traditional punk sounds and aesthetics, they seem to have adopted the once-satirical term unironically.

Still, most bands with the traditional punk sound do label themselves as “chain punk.” I speculate that this is because the “chain” style is essentially the default within the genre. It is in many ways a collection of punk stereotypes. To adopt the chain punk label is to accept many of the cliches of the genre and to wear them with pride. Egg punk rejects many of these stereotypes, but in such a hyper-specific way that it has itself become a recognizable style that is satirized in memes.

The ironic, intentionally confusing, and apparent low-quality nature of these memes is worth discussing within the broader context of contemporary internet culture. ‘“Ironic memes” and digital literacies: Exploring identity through multimodal texts,’ a paper by Vinicio Ntouvlis and Jarret Geenen, discusses how digital communities are born out of shared literacies. This paper explains how memes are often made more confusing and “less direct” to intentionally make them not understandable to outsiders. The result is a new type of ironic memes that the authors describe as “worse, on purpose.” These memes work to construct an in-group dynamic by establishing a shared digital literacy and weeding out those who lack such an understanding (Ntouvlis and Geenen 2023, 1-16). The article discusses how this constructs a community around the value of authenticity, a word I often hear used to describe DIY projects.

Heavy music genres have for a long time been interested in the exclusion of inauthentic participants, otherwise known as “posers.” While I feel that the term is invoked with less frequency in the contemporary scene, the idea of checking participants' authenticity through challenging their musical tastes and knowledge is still a primary way that underground

subcultures identify the boundaries of their community. Egg/chain punk memes combine old and new ways of gatekeeping by introducing digital irony into the much older practice of genre discourse. In the past, identifying with certain genres could get one labeled as a poser - especially subgenres that "sold out" like pop-punk or hair metal. In contrast, new, increasingly obscure or satirical genres like egg punk identify outsiders on the basis of subcultural knowledge and digital literacy. This makes egg punk a niche subject, even within the greater punk community. Older and less digitally-literate punks are unlikely to listen to egg punk or understand the memes regarding the genre's stereotypes. In this respect, internet discourse has led to a greater degree of subdivisions within an already disparate musical underground. But from those subdivisions, new genres and their respective subcultural communities emerge - hence a new generation of punk fans describing their musical and aesthetic choices as "egg".

Subgenre and Group Identity - Final Thoughts

Egg punk is just one of the many instances of artist and community driven movements towards the creation of new, niche subgenres. The process of creating new genres with very particular artistic goals appears to be one of the defining features of the contemporary DIY scene. Internet discourse has allowed for the rapid division of music communities into increasingly small subcultures. Like the linguistic genres considered by Briggs, these musical subgenres are "locally constituted and systemically interrelated." In other words, they are defined by the communities that use them and are iterated based off of previous musical styles. The ultra-specific subgenres/microgenres are often created by musicians with very particular artistic goals, and allow for the formation of communities based off of niche interests.

As I have discussed, bands in underground music communities often use genre to indicate artistic or ideological goals largely because the profit motive is mostly non-existent in those spaces. Non-commercial music communities meet unique challenges producing music in this way. DIY spaces are venues through which niche genres and radical ideas are allowed to flourish in ways not found in the mainstream. In my next chapter, I will elaborate on the mechanisms by which underground music is structured to allow niche genres to persist in DIY communities.

Chapter 3

Infrastructures of Community Self-Reliance

To those unfamiliar with Richmond punk, VSC or “Venable Street Corner” appears to be like any other townhouse in Richmond. It sits on the end of a row of identical homes in a residential neighborhood. There are no signs or advertisements outside the house, nothing that would identify this as a place where live music is performed. But, on the night of a VSC show, this row house transforms into a venue that can host around 100 people. Shows are only announced on social media, especially Instagram. The address of this building can’t be found on google or any similar platform - one simply has to know the right person to ask.

Patrons enter through the backyard, where fans and musicians can usually be found chatting and drinking warm beer as the venue is being set up. Rusty lawn furniture and a large sculpture of a head of broccoli decorate this outdoor area. Inside, patrons are directed to the kitchen, where the cabinets have been replaced by a large PA system. There is no stage - drums and amplifiers are set up directly in front of the sink. Signs of normal use as a kitchen are everywhere, including a pile of unwashed dishes. A few people involved in the DIY community live here, though I am told the residents often come and go periodically. Posters from previous shows are posted over every wall. A t-shirt is tacked to the side of the kitchen, poorly disguising a suspiciously human-sized hole in the drywall. Wooden benches line the side of the kitchen opposite of the sound system. During shows, patrons will stand on these pew-like chairs to escape the chaos of the mosh pit as they view the show from above. Crowds regularly stretch into the hallway and

living room during these shows. Some even choose to stand outside as the bands play. The music remains audible even through the walls of the house.

DIY venues

“House venues" are one of the most common, and most important types of DIY venues for underground bands. These shows are typically organized by the owners of the house. There is usually a small admission fee, no more than 15 dollars. Thanks to the low cost of operation, most of this goes directly to the bands. Inexperienced local bands often get their start as opening acts at venues like VSC. The headliners are often touring groups or established bands within the local scene. The hardcore scene prides itself on supporting small and independent artists. As a result, bands can do national tours very early into their lifespan as a band. I’ve seen bands from Texas play at VSC alongside local and DC acts. For artists in other genres of music it can take years to build up the fan base to tour at commercial venues. For many struggling artists a national tour is completely out of reach. But for the DIY hardcore community, it can be done relatively quickly if somebody has the right connections within the scene.

Warehouse venues are also an important part of the DIY scene in richmond. Richmond has two warehouse venues. One is simply known as “The Warehouse”. The other is called OSB. The Warehouse is a dedicated music venue while OSB also serves as a studio for artisans during the day, including a handmade knife manufacturer. Like house venues, these places serve a combination of touring and local acts. The warehouse primarily hosts hardcore and metal, while OSB is typically more open to other genres, especially within the realm of experimental and electronic music.

Despite being slightly more permanent than house venues, warehouse venues still sit firmly within the realm of DIY organization. These venues are commonly run by the owners and small teams of employees or volunteers. Because they are not usually used as housing, they sometimes require financial support from fans to keep the space operation. OSB recently launched a gofundme campaign to seek crowdfunding in order to keep the venue open. As of writing, the campaign has reached its $6,500 goal.

The last type of DIY venue isn't really a venue at all. "Generator shows" are outdoor events in public areas. "Hell's Door" is perhaps the most well known of these "venues." This spot is located beneath a bridge and overlooks the James river. I've never been to this spot but YouTube videos indicate that shows at Hell's Door can attract very large crowds, especially in the warmer months of the year. Another popular spot for generator shows is Skateparks. I recall attending a skatepark show in Fredrick, Maryland years ago in which performers played next to a generator that sat at the top of the circular "bowl" ramp used for skateboarding. Audience members would sit with their legs hanging off of the ramps or find another place to stand in the area. Later in the show, a mosh pit formed at the bottom of the bowl.

DIY venues are somewhat of a rarity in the United States today. When one considers the state of underground music in the country as a whole, Richmond has a comparatively large number of these spaces. This type of venue is relegated primarily to densely populated urban areas, where DIY scenes have historically thrived. Still, even cities with a long history of DIY subculture have recently been on the decline. Washington DC is an excellent example of this trend. In the 80's,

DC was at the forefront of the emerging hardcore punk music. Bands like Bad Brains, Rites of Spring, and Minor threat would pioneer early hardcore styles like straight edge and first wave emo. This would continue well into the 90's with the post-hardcore movement being spearheaded by DC's Fugazi. Fugazi was known for playing DIY venues almost exclusively, commonly charging only 5 dollars for admission. Today, house venues and other DIY spaces are rarely found in the DC area. Major commercial venues like the Anthem and 9:30 club dominate the live music space while the grassroots movement of the past has faded more and more each year. The rise in rent prices makes underground venues nonviable.

In contrast, the DIY scene has only grown in Richmond over the past few years. In my interviews, multiple community members have identified the COVID-19 pandemic as a turning point for the city's music scene. As restrictions were lifted and concerns about congregating in large groups subsided around late 2021, the community has seen an increase in turnout for shows. This is helped by an influx in new DIY venues and bands. Property prices remain relatively low in Richmond, at least compared to DC.

Activism and DIY

"We're B.O.R.N, we're from Birmingham. It's our second time in Richmond. First off, free Palestine. Fuck the IDF and the American cops that learn from them!"

These were the opening words to B.O.R.N.'s[2] set at OSB, delivered by their frontman over a wall of guitar feedback and the resounding noise of crash cymbals. Such introductions are common at

[2] An acronym standing for "Belligerent Onslaught Relentless Noise"

DIY hardcore shows, where music and politics often share the stage. Rather than thanking the venue staff or dedicating their performance to a particular person, punk bands often dedicate their set to a social or political cause. These dedications often complement the bands lyrical content and the symbolism used on their merch.

Activism within the punk community has a strong anarchist leaning. Symbols like the circle-A or the anarcho-syndicalist flag are among the most commonly used by hardcore bands. Their album art and lyrics often depict a capitalist dystopia plagued by war and pollution.

The album cover of Reckoning force's LP "Broken State" depicts a polluted, industrial landscape alongside illustrations of prison. Bourgeoisie caricatures preside over a map of the United states next to bags of money. One appears to be eating a smaller human being while sawing through Vermont with a dinner knife.

Zines, amateur publications usually associated with underground art and left-wing activism, can also be found at some punk shows. If they are offered, it will usually be a table set up near the merch stands where these small, homemade booklets are handed out for free. Zines can be given away by the bands themselves, but this literature is often given out by other members of the community. Zines have a longstanding role in DIY communities, and serve a variety of artistic and political purposes.

Researcher Sophie Mahakam Anggawi explains how zines originated from “fanzines”, self published fan works among science fiction readers in the United States in the 1930’s. Her article, “Products of Protest? The Creative Protest Potential of Zines on Bali” demonstrates how zines grew to be a worldwide phenomenon, with her research focusing on activism-oriented punk zines in Indonesia (Anggawi 2022, 59-27). In different contexts, zines are mediums for the distribution of underground art, photography, or poetry. However, when I picked up zines from a hardcore show at OSB Richmond, each one I found had a focus on a social or political cause.

I selected eight Zines from the table that night and reviewed them over the next few days. Of the eight zines, four were specifically about police reform or abolition. Two of these were accounts of the “Cop City” protests that took place in Georgia starting in 2021. “Cop City” refers to a planned $90 million police training facility to be located outside of Atlanta. The announcement of this project led many to camp out in the proposed area in an attempt to delay construction of the facility. The protestors viewed the project as both a tremendous waste of resources and an objectionable step towards the militarization of Atlanta’s police (Weill 2023, 4). Over the past few years, the events of these actions have become a touchstone for punks and activists. I once

saw a band dedicate their set to Tortuguita, a protester killed by police during the Cop City protests. Two other booklets were guides to typical forms of Anarchist organization and direct action. One titled “Affinity Groups: Essential Building Blocks of Anarchist Organization” details a method of organizing direct action by forming small groups of like-minded individuals known as affinity groups. Such groups are a long-standing tactic of anarchist mobilization. Another zine, entitled “What is Security Culture: A Guide to Staying Safe” examined techniques used by anarchists to avoid legal troubles associated with their activism.

While punk shows themselves do not constitute activist mobilization, the activist portion of the punk community creates inroads towards political action. While many punks are not directly involved in left-wing political projects, most are sympathetic to socialist and anarchist ideals. When the band Cop/Out used their stage time at The Camel to promote communism, the crowd cheered in agreement. This predisposition towards left-wing politics makes this exchange between the punk and activist communities effective from an activist point of view. In turn, the anticapitalist disposition of the punk community as a whole significantly is reflected in the DIY ethic employed by the underground music community.

DIY and Community Self-Reliance

When browsing the merch tables in between sets at an OSB show, I came across a few brand new 7” vinyl records from the band Sirkka, one of the touring bands that night. These records were being sold for eight dollars each. While I don’t collect vinyl, I've been to enough record stores to know that this was an unusually low price. I turned to Max, who does collect records, and asked him how the band was able to sell records at such a cheap rate. He responded: “Well,

they aren't making money off of them. Bands like these usually make just enough to keep touring."

For artists within the musical underground, the DIY ethic extends to nearly all elements of the artistic process. Basically all DIY bands and music projects are multimedia to some extent. Visual art is used on album covers and clothing. Music is put out on a variety of mediums, including both physical and digital platforms. Additionally, live performances are a distinct medium through which bands deliver their art to an audience. All of these mediums are treated differently in DIY spaces compared to their commercial counterparts. A primary reason for this is that DIY communities conceptualize value in ways radically different from the mainstream music industry. Discussions of systems of value are frequent in contemporary anthropological discourse (Graeber 2001) (Graeber 2013, 219-243). This chapter attempts to explain how DIY practices reveal that underground music communities construct alternative understandings of value that lie outside of capitalist assumptions.

Bands and musicians of any genre usually have merchandise of some type. T-shirts, posters, and vinyl records are all commonly available at merchandise stands. At concerts for popular, non-DIY artists, this merchandise can be very expensive. T-shirts can cost forty to fifty dollars at some live events. These shirts, while not always of the highest quality, still usually feature professional, full color prints. In contrast, DIY merchandise is often handmade, and sold for low prices. DIY T-shirts are most commonly sold for 15 dollars. At-home screen printing allows for the duplication of images onto clothing with relative ease and minimal expense. This technique usually allows for prints of only one or two colors. This is not a particularly damaging limitation

for punks, however. High contrast stencil images are a mainstay of punk art. Even today, with the availability of color printing and digital editing software, many bands continue to opt for the monochrome, stencil aesthetic on their album art and merchandise.

The DIY ethic is clearly reflected in the production of the music itself. Most DIY genres pride themselves on having noisy and low-fidelity production. The use of cheap microphones and recording in areas that are not acoustically treated are common ways of achieving this. Guitar and bass tone is altered through the use of guitar pedals and amplifiers to create a noisy and unclear sound. Guitar feedback is often intentionally added to recordings and live performances to add a layer of piercing sound to the mix. At one point, many of these elements were unavoidable in a home recording context without spending thousands of dollars on recording equipment. In recent years, high quality recording equipment and audio editing software has become more widely available than ever before. Still, elements of "old school" DIY production are often intentionally invoked. Sometimes this serves as a tribute to classic bands who originally recorded under similar conditions.

In 2022, when Straitjacket was recording our first EP, I was tasked with mixing the recording. We did not have a professional space to record, meaning that most of it was done in my basement. At the time, I did not have any formal training in audio engineering, nor did we have much in the way of audio equipment. The entire EP was recorded through my cheap audio interface and two dynamic microphones. These factors contributed to a low-fi recording that adhered to many of the conventions of the DIY ethic. Max had always encouraged the rest of us

to adhere to DIY principles in our activities as a band. In the case of this recording, the DIY elements were born out of necessity as much as ideology.

Shortly after releasing the digital recordings onto Bandcamp, Spotify, Youtube, and other streaming services, we were contacted by someone interested in releasing our EP on his label, called XTRO. XTRO only releases music on cassette tape. While many genres have moved past cassettes as a medium, tapes are increasingly common as a way for modern hardcore bands to create a physical release for their music. Their inexpensive design makes them ideal for small, independent bands who release only short albums or EPs. We happily agreed and within a few months he sent us around 15 tapes, and retained several to sell on his bandcamp page. He never requested payment, telling us this in our Instagram direct messages: “I don’t do contracts or any of that shit I just make tapes and send them, never made a dime I always lose money but it’s what I love”

DIY record labels act very differently from mainstream labels. At no point did Straitjacket forfeit the ownership of our music to a label in exchange for a service. Instead, someone who simply liked our music created tapes for us, free of charge. The tapes on the XTRO Bandcamp page were sold for five dollars each, a price unlikely to exceed the price of production including the tapes sent to us. In this way, XTRO and other DIY labels act less as businesses and more as facilitators for the spread of underground music. To claim ownership of the music of another would be a contradiction of the DIY ethic. When bands “do it themselves” it is understood that they ought to retain the right to make decisions on how that music is utilized and distributed.

In the process of creating a music culture that rejects typical understandings of value and profit, DIY labels simultaneously adopt and reject many of the structural elements of the mainstream music industry. There are many formal similarities: DIY scenes still use structures like labels and genres to organize music, but these concepts are altered in an attempt to better reflect the values of the DIY ethic. Contracts signing away the ownership of recordings, one of the defining characteristics of mainstream record labels, is notably absent in DIY labels. In this way, DIY communities take that which is useful from the commercial music industry and discard aspects that they find inauthentic or exploitative. Failure to excise these objectionable elements is a deviation from the DIY ethic.

Alternative Economies - Final Thoughts

Anthropologists have a tendency to highlight social organizations which demonstrate understandings of value that are different from those assumed under modern capitalist frameworks (Graeber 2001) (Graeber 2013, 219-243) . Marcel Mauss famously drew on examples from Polynesia and the Pacific Northwest, introducing many to the idea of the gift economy. Mauss's writing provides a look into economic systems very different from our own, in which the motive to exchange resources is based on notions of reciprocity rather than the accumulation of capital. His major work, *The Gift* (Mauss 1925) has influenced anthropologists not only to consider alternative economies from a descriptive standpoint, but also to incorporate these observations into a critical reexamination of our own capitalist economy. I see such a critique present in the ideals and practices of DIY musicians and labels. The study of DIY

economies challenges the notion of a universal, capitalist understanding of value and offers insight into what alternative economies could look like on a larger scale.

Clearly, underground music economies do not themselves provide a holistic alternative to capitalist production. Like all Americans, punks still rent from landlords, work as employees, and purchase food and other goods from privately owned companies. What the punk economy does demonstrate is an attempt to remove the community's artistic pursuits from capitalist understandings of ownership and profit. Underground musicians' labor is not owned by others, even if they work in collaboration with DIY labels. In many cases, this insistence on independence leads bands to be monetarily unsuccessful. Signing onto major labels would potentially be more lucrative for these artists, but it would also mean compromising the artistic integrity demanded by the DIY ethic and entering into an exploitative corporate system. The underground bands that I observed aren't unpopular because they are untalented or simply haven't "made it" yet. They reside in a self-prescribed obscurity, fully aware of steps they could take to make their sound more appealing to the mainstream. But taking steps towards this end would come at the expense of authenticity - something valued over monetary gain within the underground community.

Conclusions: The DIY Ethic

On a personal level, I deeply enjoyed my time participating in and studying Richmond's underground community. Within this niche set of subcultures I witnessed new forms of community building and organizations that I found to be both welcoming and profoundly unique. That being said, I do not wish to idealize the groups I write about. Where I saw community I also saw division. Where I observed order I also observed discord. And when I was introduced to the simulated violence known as moshing, I also frequently saw that simulation break down into fully-realized violence. My goal is not to criticize or defend any particular elements of Richmond's underground music culture. Rather, I would like to present my observations as I saw them and allow the people I spoke with to explain their own viewpoints on the subculture that they are a part of. Through use of the ethnographic method I hope that I have created a balanced introduction to a subculture that not all readers will be familiar with. I also hope that my project gives greater context for some of the community's more controversial practices.

While I attempted to incorporate many different forms of music into my evaluation of the musical underground, I recognize that my research mostly led me to examine punk and metal. While these two genres are among the most associated with DIY practices, I recognize that the influence of DIY is very prevalent across many genres outside of the rock sphere. Future research on other genres, such as electronic, experimental, and noise music would help to explain the full range of expressions possible through DIY practice. It is also very important to consider that DIY culture is not relegated to the music world alone. I feel that my discussion of zines was a very preliminary look at one of the other faces of DIY. The impact of DIY culture on other

realms of art, activism, and community organization should not be disregarded, and I feel that these impacts are excellent grounds for future research.

I find the term "ethic" to be particularly descriptive of DIY practices due to the word's typical use in the description of moral principles. To the people I observed and spoke with during the course of this project, DIY was far more than an aesthetic trend. DIY serves as the guiding moral philosophy of underground music, and like all moral philosophies, it creates certain obligations. The DIY ethic demands authenticity and community support. It also prohibits many actions. To DIY adherents, "selling out" or accepting the assistance of the mainstream music industry is a moral failure. Talented bands who could "make it" in mainstream circles thus make a sacrifice by staying within the underground sphere. This sacrifice, however, is not without reward. The structures of the underground community are more than capable of providing long-term support for artists that adhere to the DIY ethic. Fans and musicians alike have found a lifelong home among like-minded individuals within the DIY community both in Richmond, and around the world.

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