

“IT’S MY JOB TO KEEP PUNK ROCK ELITE”:  
INFORMATION AND SECRECY IN THE CHICAGO DIY PUNK MUSIC SCENE

by

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## ABSTRACT

### “IT’S MY JOB TO KEEP PUNK ROCK ELITE”: INFORMATION AND SECRECY IN THE CHICAGO DIY PUNK MUSIC SCENE

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Under the Supervision of Professor W. Warner Wood

This thesis examines how the DIY punk scene in Chicago has utilized secretive information dissemination practices to manage boundaries between itself and mainstream society. Research for this thesis started in 2013, following the North Atlantic Treaty Organization’s meeting in Chicago. This event caused a crisis within the Chicago DIY punk scene that primarily relied on residential spaces, from third story apartments to dirt-floored basements, as venues. The scene became vulnerable to closures by law enforcement, who were directed by Chicago mayor Rahm Emanuel to crackdown on activities taking place at potential locations for radical activity prior to the NATO convention. This case of mistaken identity and its effects on the Chicago DIY punk scene were echoed in the information dissemination practices of the scene as promoters called for more secrecy to reduce the risk of further police detection.

This study focuses on how the DIY punk scene in Chicago “stays punk” without stagnation and dissolution by addressing the tension between secrecy and exclusivity that increased after NATO 2012. Though academia has often turned its gaze towards the punk scene, such as the incredibly popular work of Sara Thornton on subcultural capital and Dick

Hebdige's focus on punk style, attention has primarily been given to the style and exclusivity perceived to be dominant within the punk scene.

This thesis seeks to examine the underlying processes at work within the DIY community utilizing the observed themes of authenticity, performance, subcultural capital and power to explore how the DIY punk scene in Chicago manages the tension of maintaining boundaries between it and the mainstream while gaining the participants essential to its survival.

Authenticity is a useful boundary marker because it allows participants to be properly vetted before joining the scene as they have proven they will support the community. Authenticity helps in both hard and good times within the Chicago punk music scene, as it allows promoters to more directly market their idea of punk. The importance of performance is seen in the way promoters use their expectations to define punk behavior and participation within the scene. Promoters' expectations for members "being there" helps them to cultivate a supportive scene. Without members the scene ceases to exist, and the particular brand of punk being promoted can no longer sustain itself. Subcultural capital and power are how promoters maintain control over aspects of the Chicago DIY punk scene. Post-NATO 2012 promoters were able to practice the role of scene shapers, which allowed them to influence what bands played, where they played, and rules to be followed. All three themes within this thesis interweave and relate to how the Chicago DIY punk scene balances its efforts to remain autonomous from the mainstream while trying to keep the scene alive. Closing out this research, the Chicago DIY punk scene hosted a show for the band G.L.O.S.S. whose popularity challenged the post-NATO information dissemination practices causing a shift away from secrecy in the scene.

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TO  
Jimmy

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## CHAPTER 1: Introduction

### Introduction

It was the beginning of June 2015 and the show was already beginning to get unbearably hot as people packed into the basement of a Chicago bungalow on the north side of the city. Any and every window was “sound proofed” with a hodgepodge of items including, but not limited to, egg cartons, cardboard, old comforters, and stuffed animals. This precautionary step deemed necessary to avoid noise complaints coupled with the mass of rapidly moving bodies were the main reasons for the stifling subterranean atmosphere.

The second band was playing and people in the crowd surged forward to sing along with a song they all seemed to know. The “pit” was not as aggressive as others I had seen at larger shows where strangers slammed into each other with abandon.<sup>1</sup> Here the people were slightly more careful of others. Whenever someone slipped on the beer drenched floor other members of the crowd swept in to lift them up, give them a shoulder shake, and send them on their way. This continued for about twenty minutes until the band reached their final song sending everyone forward into the space where the band was playing. The lack of a stage allowed the audience to easily join the singer and guitarists behind their microphones. The band pressed back into the drums as their mics were taken over by fans. The song ended and everyone cheered and headed for the exit. The promoter of the show quickly grabbed a mic and said “if I missed taking your money at the door, don’t be cheap and come see me!”

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<sup>1</sup> The pit is the area directly in front of where the band is playing where the crowd tends to become the most physical by aggressively dancing and slamming into one another.

This show was taking place at a Do-It-Yourself or DIY unlicensed house venue. DIY is an ethos that in the realm of punk is defined as an anti-consumerism movement.<sup>2</sup> As such, DIY pushes punks to avoid the mainstream entertainment industry by doing activities, such as recording their own bands and distributing their own music, for themselves.

As I shuffled slowly towards the door with the rest of the crowd seeking a reprieve from the sticky heat of the room, I was handed several fliers from different people positioned near the exit. The fliers announced shows at houses by house name only.<sup>3</sup> No addresses were given. Two listed email addresses while the other simply said “ask a punk” (Figure 1). I could easily envision the alley ways and paths leading up to the back entrances of the houses listed on two of the fliers.<sup>4</sup> The third was unknown to me, so I doubled back into the oppressively stagnant basement to ask the person passing out fliers.

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<sup>2</sup> (Matten 2016)

<sup>3</sup> DIY show spaces are given names as identifiers instead of addresses to avoid unwanted detection.

<sup>4</sup> After some discussions with members of the community we decided that leaving the names of the punk houses out was not necessary.



Figure 1. Flier for a show at Weenie Hut JR's featuring G.L.O.S.S., C.C.T.V., The Bug, Cochina, & Tigress

The phrase “ask a punk” was what had originally brought my attention to secrecy within the Chicago DIY punk scene due to its contradiction with the goal of inclusivity being espoused by members. Information dissemination methods that utilize secrecy tend to denote exclusivity, so why would the Chicago DIY punk scene try to remain unnoticed? Secrecy for the scene is presumed necessary due to the illegality of shows at unlicensed venues that can face closure if the police or landlord discover the events. However, the scene at the time I observed it was living in the aftermath of an event that caused it to burrow even further underground: the hosting of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in Chicago during 2012. This event was the catalyst for fears within the scene that people within the mainstream were out to shut house

shows down. Many DIY spaces were shut down just prior to the NATO event based on the assumption by the Chicago police that where there are punks, there are also radical politics, specifically anarchism. This event startled the scene and logically led to the DIY punk community being more hush-hush. However, during my research I saw the scene change into a more inclusive space while holding onto their secretive methods of information dissemination as the events preceding NATO faded into history.

Exploring this contradiction is where my research began. Returning to the show, I found a punk to ask, “Hey! What’s up with this place?” I was able to directly ask the promoter who was passing out the fliers in a basement where I already knew some house rules: always go around back and never loiter in the front yard. This particular house had been in the hands of punks for over 20 years with new groups of people moving in once the one before them moved on. The promoter gave me the address and some other details such as who was currently living in the house and that it was a “dry space”.<sup>5</sup>

Without having already been at the show I could have possibly still known about the upcoming event at the house I was unfamiliar with by means of social media invites, fliers in shops, or word-of-mouth. However, every method would still require that I know how to access further information. This is what drew my attention to the information dissemination practices within the Chicago DIY punk scene. Secrecy has always had its place in underground music communities, but at a certain point secrecy becomes the main tool for gatekeeping and exclusivity, two terms that as mentioned above, seem to run contrary to the DIY ethos with

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<sup>5</sup> Referring to a “dry space” means no drugs or alcohol are permitted at the show space. This could be because the residents are Straightedge, a subset of the punk scene that abstains from drugs and alcohol, or because they wanted there to be less risk involved if they were to be stopped by the police.

which I had become familiar.<sup>6</sup> The research for this thesis then took to trying to gain perspective on how information dissemination, due to the need for secrecy, influences the DIY punk community in the city. It is the goal of this thesis to explain how boundaries around and within the Chicago DIY punk scene are formed by information dissemination practices and shaped by the underlying themes of authenticity, performance, subcultural capital and power.

In the second chapter, I provide a brief history of punk. This chapter covers the transformation of punk from a movement in England to the United States. American punks adapted it to their own needs throughout the United States. DIY was established out of necessity starting with the need for space outside of the so-called mainstream licensed venues. One event in the recent history of the Chicago DIY punk scene, the house venue shutdowns prior to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in 2012, will be examined as an important factor influencing the way information dissemination is handled by members of the scene. A brief review of the history of punk will contextualize the themes revealed during the research for this thesis and will also provide a perspective on the relationship between DIY and secrecy in information dissemination practices in the Chicago punk scene.

The third chapter examines how the theme of authenticity is revealed through the information dissemination practices of promoters and used to establish and maintain boundaries. Promoters face the challenge of protecting a show space from detection by police and unwanted members of the mainstream while bringing as many people to the show as possible. They balance the tension between secrecy and exclusivity by utilizing the authenticity of show-goers as boundary making practices to the DIY punk scene in Chicago. The authenticity

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<sup>6</sup> (Williams 2011:136)

of punks is judged based on their insider knowledge of the punk scene through their social relationships and style. This makes authenticity an effective tool for constructing boundaries as promoters ensure that only those who know where to look or who to ask will receive the necessary information. Perceptions of insider knowledge are determined by current knowledge of the scene as expressed through style and pre-existing social relationships.

The fourth chapter discusses the theme of performance observed in the DIY punk scene. How punks are supposed to perform and who sets these expectations is examined by looking at who is accepted at show spaces. Promoters are responsible for letting the right people into the show space. Acting appropriately in the scene is discussed on two fronts: participation and subcultural etiquette. Both aspects of an individual's performance reflect on their reputation as punks. Appropriate subcultural etiquette is determined by promoters and the residents of the show space. Participation on the other hand is primarily judged by members of the scene as a reflection upon an individual's reputation as a punk. People who actively go to shows are given more of a voice within the scene because their comments and criticisms are backed by experience. Others who go to shows, but primarily drink outside or leave before all the bands have finished, are considered to be less punk due to their lack of participation.

The fifth chapter examines the relationship between subcultural capital and power within the Chicago DIY punk scene. Subcultural capital is utilized to obtain positions of power within the DIY scene. Subcultural capital, defined by Thornton (1997) as a measure of “hipness” or “being in the know”, is utilized by promoters in the Chicago DIY punk scene to create social networks that connect the scene while also remaining outside of the mainstream.<sup>7</sup> The high

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<sup>7</sup> (Thornton 1997: 200)

social position of promoters amongst other members of the DIY punk community allows them to exert power. Promoters determine both when and where shows take place, what bands will play, and ultimately who will be let into the show. This chapter also presents a case study that examines the occurrence of differing promoter definitions of the punk scene. The clash in promoter opinions ultimately led to the creation of different factions splitting off to form their own spaces where they can be punk as they see fit. In this way, the discussion of subcultural capital and power illuminates how promoters within the scene struggle to retain their definitions of punk while seeking to gain the support of members as part of what I call their “scene-shaping” practices.

## **Methods**

Primary research for this thesis was conducted between June 2013 and July 2016. The punk scene in Chicago is scattered across the city, with informal show spaces spanning many of the city’s culturally and economically diverse neighborhoods. It is worth noting that, though Chicago’s DIY punk scene spans the entire city, there does tend to be a division between the scenes in the north and south sides. My research primarily focused on shows and events that took place on the north and northwest sides of the city. This is not to say that people on the north side are not invited or are barred from attending shows in the south side, but the shows I was made aware of tended to be on the north side with few exceptions.<sup>8</sup>

The main method used to conduct interviews were face-to-face audio recordings. Participants were given the option of where they would like their interviews conducted with

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<sup>8</sup> Fliers handed out at shows or seen at local shops tended to emphasize events at spaces that were being held at nearby houses rather than the ones taking place across town.

most choosing to participate from their own apartments. Interviews were recorded using two different digital voice recorders in order to ensure the conversation was captured and of good quality for future playback and transcription. Field notes were taken at shows the old fashioned way by utilizing a notebook whenever there were details that called for commentating. Reflective notes were also utilized after every show to provide further detail on events that had taken place during a time that did not permit onsite note taking.

The primary sample population was Chicago DIY punk show promoters. Promoters were accessible at shows, but some snowball sampling was also used to contact potential interviewees that were harder to contact or identify while at events. Chicago punk show participants were also contacted in person with some snowball sampling involved. Due to the nature of the study and the apparent ever-changing nature of the Chicago DIY punk scene, it was imperative to include people that were active in the scene during the time of the study.

Due to the possible legal risks of identification for participants, I did not request that my interviewees sign a written informed consent form. In lieu of a signed consent form, all participants were given consent form documents to read over prior to the interview. Maintaining anonymity was a priority for both participants and locations, therefore all names, addresses, and other identifying details have been omitted.<sup>9</sup>

It should also be noted that my personal affiliation with some members of the Chicago punk scene allowed for me to bypass the initial experience of information seeking. I have attended DIY punk shows for around twelve years in different cities. I have toured with DIY

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<sup>9</sup> DIY show spaces, particularly houses, are given names that allow them to be referenced without giving away identifying information on forms of media such as fliers, posters, and social media event listings.



punk bands within the United States and in Japan. My prior experiences in the punk scene allowed me access to information such as house locations and provided me with a familiarity with members of the Chicago scene.

I did however find that regardless of my past experiences, I was still a stranger to the intricacies of DIY show promotion within the current Chicago punk scene. I found that while attending shows over the summer I was constantly meeting new people. In 2010 I could go to a show and know nearly everyone in attendance, but some shows over the summer while I was conducting research in 2015 had barely any or, in two instances, no familiar faces. People I knew to promote shows had ceased being actively involved, while others had stopped attending altogether. Different people, primarily younger individuals in their early twenties, were now living in show houses, playing in bands, and booking events.

## **CHAPTER 2: A Brief History of the DIY Punk Music Scene in Chicago: An Art of Being in Between**

### **Introduction**

Punk began in England in the 1970's as a reaction to the economic hardships facing many people within the country. Particularly youths during that era were facing a bleak outlook with few prospects for future employment. This was juxtaposed with the hippie movement of the 1960's that espoused change and hope for future generations. Punk grew out of the hopelessness of the youth in England and sought to be antithetical to everything considered mainstream. This antithetical positionality was expressed through various means including dress as they literally adorned themselves with items described as garbage such as trash bags.<sup>10</sup> Safety pins, patched clothing, and generally being unkempt set them apart aesthetically from the mainstream. They took it further by creating a music scene that promoted music anyone could play if they were able to get their hands on instruments. The music was loud, brash, and more often than not, political. For example, the Sex Pistols (1976) (a well-known band instrumental in bringing punk to the U.S.) "Anarchy in the UK" lyrics express punk identity markers (and political positionality) typical of English punks of this period:

I am an anti-Christ  
I am an anarchist  
Don't know what I want  
But I know how to get it  
I want to destroy the passerby

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<sup>10</sup> (Hebdige 1979)

These lyrics highlighted the frustration of the English punks against the rest of English society. Punks held members of the mainstream and the government responsible for what they saw as the current hopeless state of their country.

Punk in the United States grew out of the punk scene in 1970's England. New York was the touchdown point for punk within the United States, which started around 1974. Rock clubs like CBGB and Max's Kansas City hosted some of the first punk bands in New York City. These clubs had a long history of hosting bands such as the Velvet Underground, which would come to be known as proto-punk. The Velvet Underground paved the way for punk bands in New York in the 1970's. Mixing rock with the Avant-garde, they brought the art scene into punk and helped foster the influence of artistic non-conformity for which American punk would come to be known.

New York at the time also had its own issues that added to its particular brand of punk, though it lacked the exact economic and social contexts of punk overseas. Punk in the United States became uniquely American. Disaffected youth were drawn to the newly forming punk scene. Blush (2016) notes the evolution of punk when it hit New York,

Punk quickly evolved into an "umbrella" movement for nonconformists with an edgy new attitude. A major aspect of punk was its intense reaction to the 70s hippie-esque escapism. Punks espoused "reality," capturing glitter-rock's brashness in a bid to refresh rock. That's why the short hair, fast music, and FU attitude proved so enticing to some, and so threatening to the status quo.

The anger was there, but it was now reaching out to people who sought a position of non-conformity from the mainstream, whereas in the UK that position was foisted upon them.

By appealing to the broader label of non-conformists, American punk started to move towards a scene where there were no expectations. Punks were people who made their own

brand of music and formed their own communities outside of the mainstream. American punk became something that created whatever it wanted to with little to no impetus. This is where the ideology of DIY began to permeate the scene. Bands such as Television, the New York Dolls, and the Ramones created their own versions of punk in the newly forming New York scene. All three bands mingled genres and introduced new elements into their own brand of punk. These bands found places to play where scenes quickly grew around their bands.

Punk made its way to Los Angeles in the latter half of the 1970's, shortly after New York. Major bands such as the Damned and the Sex Pistols played in Los Angeles, which imprinted the scene with how punk should look and be performed. Compton (2009) reflects back on how seeing such as an influential band influenced his idea of punk, "Dave Vanian lit a flare and the hot sparks cascaded over my shoulders and burnt the crap out of me, leaving holes throughout my shirt. I wore the wounds proudly. It wasn't the first injury that my love of punk rock would lay on me."<sup>11</sup> Punk in Los Angeles, much like punk in New York, was shaped through its interpretation by the new members of the scene. Punk in California adapted from what the area had to offer, which led to a strong scene based on Chicano culture, Chicano punk.<sup>12</sup> Los Angeles featured iconic punk bands such as the Germs. Major bands from Los Angeles, such as the Germs, Agent Orange, and X became bastions for an anti-corporate music scene.

Chicago was different than the coasts. Chicago, unlike the other scenes, was passed by during the tours of major punk bands from the UK and instead only received the records. Punk again was warped as it made its way inland from New York and Los Angeles. The start of punk in

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<sup>11</sup> Dave Vanian is the lead singer of one of the first punk bands in England, the Damned.

<sup>12</sup> (Threadgould 2016)

Chicago was considered to be derivative of the scene in England as an interview by Blush (2001:219) with John Kezdy, an original member one of Chicago's first punk bands the Effigies, notes,

The early Chicago scene was basically art schoolers and poseurs, very much the posturing crowd—they didn't do much in the way of making music. They latched onto a scene mostly fed by music from England. They were very much against a lot of California Punk but were into the New York stuff. It didn't really produce anything; there was a very small cliquish group of people who monopolized a few bars in Chicago.

Chicago's scene lacked the vibrant music club scene that the other cities who experienced punk a little earlier had. Music clubs like CBGB weren't in Chicago and they made due by fitting in where they could. The scene primarily focused around a couple of dance clubs on Chicago's north side where punk music could be played as bands had yet to form in the new scene. Reflecting on the early days of the Chicago punk scene, (Blush 2001) notes that it lacked all context and became known primarily for the wild antics of those participating in the dance club scene. They were still anti-mainstream, but it was in a way that seemed to lack direction.

Historically speaking, punk in Chicago has been an exclusionary community in regards to mainstream society. The punk community in the city excluded the mainstream by utilizing methods, such as DIY, that allowed the scene to sever ties with the mainstream's entertainment industry. The punk community was also able to separate themselves from non-punks as a by-product of the secrecy required to maintain the DIY unlicensed venues. However, punk's exclusionary nature at times runs in dialectical opposition to the DIY ethic it has adopted within the Chicago scene. The information dissemination methods within the punk music community, traditionally used to maintain semi-autonomy from the mainstream, can also lead to the stagnation of a scene that becomes too insular due to secrecy. Looking at the history of

the punk music community in Chicago shows the tension between upholding a DIY ethos and secrecy, which will be explored throughout this chapter.

Punk in Chicago seemed to get off on the wrong foot from the start. In the late 1970's and early 80's when the punk music community was thriving in the Chicago, their issues with the mainstream entertainment industry were exacerbated.<sup>13</sup> Clubs and bars within the city rejected the fast paced music performed with less than desirable skill. These licensed venues in the area at the time were seeking to showcase cover bands and other acts that promoted the popular music of the day.<sup>14</sup> According to punk veterans from the scene's early days, even when the bands were allowed to play they found that crowds quickly turned hostile to their style of music. This hostility often ending in violence with patrons and the police reifying their destructive image.<sup>15</sup> Licensed venues were not as willing to provide space to groups that they stereotyped as violent and destructive.<sup>16</sup> To make matters worse, venues that allowed punk bands to play were often inaccessible to people under the age of twenty-one, which tended to exclude a large number of punks, as the group skewed young. This created further issues with licensed venues as acts were expected to draw crowds that would spend money on drinks during the show.<sup>17</sup>

### **Survival through DIY**

Members of the punk scene quickly began to realize that in order to continue to perform their style of music they would need to find an alternative to the mainstream. This is

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<sup>13</sup> (Losurdo & Tillman 2007); (Blush 2001)

<sup>14</sup> (Makagon 2015:21)

<sup>15</sup> (Reyes 2015); (Cerzigan 2016)

<sup>16</sup> (Makagon 2015:21)

<sup>17</sup> (Blush 2001)

when punk began to fully embrace the ethos of DIY, which led to running unlicensed, illegal venues out of the only spaces that were available: residential buildings.<sup>18</sup> Underground, the DIY punk scene survived through the use of unlicensed venues and spaces such as warehouses, residential houses, and skate parks.<sup>19</sup> Though shows still faced issues with being broken up by the police, the scene had found a way to work around their rejection from licensed venues.

De Certeau's (1984) discussion of tactics versus strategies logically follows the attempted separation of the Chicago DIY punk scene from the mainstream society. Strategies are linked with institutions and structures of power who are the "producers", whereas tactics are the tools of "consumers" acting within environments defined by the strategies of the powerful.<sup>20</sup> Tactics allow for individuals to take advantage of voids within strategies that become spaces for the enactment of identities.<sup>21</sup> Chicago punks found voids in residential spaces where punks were able to eke out a way for their scene to survive. De Certeau (1984: 30) describes the creation of areas in which the rules can be bent, or made to allow a certain amount of "play",

Without leaving the place where he has no choice but to live and which lays down its law for him, he establishes within it a degree of plurality and creativity. By an art of being in between, he draws unexpected results from his situation.

This art of being in between as noted by de Certeau (1984) allowed punks to further establish what their spaces meant to them, allowing them more control over how the Chicago DIY punk scene took shape.

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<sup>18</sup> (Galil 2014)

<sup>19</sup> (Makagon 2015:25)

<sup>20</sup> (Kosmala 2015)

<sup>21</sup> (Kosmala 2015)

After utilizing unlicensed venues, the punk community also started taking on other DIY tasks, such as recording their own bands and distributing their own merchandise. DIY, as practiced in the Chicago punk scene, operates on the idea of “making do” as members are encouraged to use any resources at their disposal to accomplish their goals.<sup>22</sup> Increased use of DIY practices was spawned from the Chicago punk scene’s wish to remain separate from the mainstream. With DIY, bands began receiving nearly, if not all of the profits from shows. The size of house venues and the resulting smaller crowds led the scene to be more self-reliant as more commercial options became less necessary for survival of the scene.

After the move underground, the Chicago punk community also started to divide into different scenes, which was fitting given that shows had much smaller spaces with which to work. These smaller scenes were possible because the community was quickly filtered from large licensed venues to residential spaces, which resulted in a surplus of punks seeking out shows. The surplus of punks at this time seeking spaces to play their style of punk embraced the DIY ethos, forming their own genres whenever the greater punk music scene failed to fulfill their needs. Straightedge punks, for instance, made claims that living drug-free was what was right for the punk community.<sup>23</sup> Their clash with the greater punk community’s lifestyle, which they found excessive and lacking in ideology, led them to splitting off.<sup>24</sup> Another example, political punks, split off because they didn’t see enough political action within the scene and they wanted to focus on how they could, as a group, take on issues. Divisions within the punk

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<sup>22</sup> (de Certeau 1984); (Moran 2011)

<sup>23</sup> (Azerrad 2001)

<sup>24</sup> (Kuhn 2010)



community of this nature are noted by O'Connor (2008:15) as natural occurrences given that they are "fields of cultural production" in Pierre Bourdieu's sense of the phrase,

Those with a stake in an artistic or musical field define the field in terms of their own investments in it. So we read that punk in England ended in 1978, or that American hardcore existed from 1980 to 1986, or that punk "broke" in 1991. And to challenge these versions is often taken as personal affront. Well, were you there? Or dismissed as the personal opinion to which everyone is entitled in the letters pages of fanzines. All of this disagreement is not surprising because artistic and cultural fields always have a range of diversity. Most people have personal experience of only part of it.

The field in this case is the DIY punk community that presents its own rules and ideas for operating as a music scene.<sup>25</sup> Specifically, the DIY punk scene is a field of cultural production, which Bourdieu (1993: 40) considers to be the structure of social space for a community based on aesthetic practices and competences. This description of a field of cultural production is closely related to tenets of DIY punk. The punk community is situated within the dominant culture, but actively seeks to avoid the overarching ideals of financial gain, aspirations of stardom, and technical proficiency, by celebrating the idea that everyone is capable of being a creator or producer.

The field of cultural production helps disguise the self-interest of actors, which Bourdieu suggests as essential to the actions of individuals, for if they know what they are doing is self-serving, the illusion of participating in something meaningful is broken.<sup>26</sup> They assert an ethos of "everyone can participate" even when individuals who can't demonstrate subcultural capital are prevented from coming to shows due to secrecy. The implication is that when individuals participate in DIY punk, though they are gaining subcultural capital and thereby power from the

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<sup>25</sup> (Bourdieu 1984)

<sup>26</sup> (Rabinow 1996: 9)

interaction, they do not acknowledge it because doing so would go against the impetus for participation. In the DIY punk community, and in other fields of cultural production, the illusion of participating in something meaningful is key. Simply participating to gain capital in any of its forms negates the purpose for forming the DIY punk community, which ultimately seeks to operate autonomously outside of the influence of class and mainstream society.<sup>27</sup>

As members of the punk scene split to form smaller factions, or their own fields of cultural production, the instability of the DIY scene was first revealed. Support for all of the different genres of punk waned by the late 1980's.<sup>28</sup> This resulted in a diminished scene as participants lost interest. Participation fell to the point where there were too few bands and not enough people to watch and support them.

In the late 1990's, as punk in the city began to surge again, issues of gentrification began to plague house based venues. Punk houses that hosted shows were succumbing to rising rents in neighborhoods like Wicker Park.<sup>29</sup> As punks could no longer afford the rents in their neighborhoods, they were forced to find new areas that were often in neighborhoods with higher crime rates and limited public transportation. Gentrification is another force that demonstrates the fragility of the DIY punk scene due to its reliance on participants for financial support. One venue called the Lucky Gator Loft, originally located in the Wicker Park neighborhood of Chicago was forced out of the area due to rising rents. The group of people who ran the show house moved into a neighborhood in West Garfield Park, an area farther away from many of the scene's participants. People with the ability to drive out to the new

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<sup>27</sup> (Bourdieu 1984: 40)

<sup>28</sup> (Blush 2001: 223)

<sup>29</sup> (Galil 2016)

space were often dissuaded from making the trip due to incidents of cars being broken into and stolen during the shows. Multiple bands had equipment stolen while parked for shows in the neighborhood. The one plus side of the move was that their new neighborhood was unlikely to face being shut down as the area had a minimal police presence. However, the house finally called it quits after the participation at their primarily pop-punk based shows began to recede.

## **NATO & DIY**

Avoiding shutdowns handed out by law enforcement became more of a concern for DIY spaces starting in 2012. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was set to take place in Chicago in May of 2012. Prior to the start of the summit, Chicago mayor Rahm Emanuel proposed a crackdown by police on certain activities that were deemed likely to produce anarchist protestors.<sup>30</sup> This generalization of the punk community by the Emanuel administration stemmed from their larger-scale effort to inspect all voices of dissent as potential terrorism, not just the punk community. Under the administration's direction, the police targeted a wide range of politically active groups including, but not limited to Chicago's Mental Health Movement and the Occupy Chicago headquarters.<sup>31</sup> The police association of punk with political radicalism seemed to stem from the participation of some punks in the Occupy movement at the time as well as the historical engagement of punks in radical politics, though their specific reasoning for investigating potential terrorist threats was not revealed.<sup>32</sup>

In this case, their assumption was off base as shows were not typically the space for discussing political agendas. Lyrics may have been in support of certain causes or an event may

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<sup>30</sup> (Meyer 2014); (Dumke 2015)

<sup>31</sup> (Cassello 2014)

<sup>32</sup> (Cassello 2014)

have been a benefit for someone wrongfully imprisoned, but plans regarding political organization were not being discussed at shows. Shows at this time primarily focused on people hearing their preferred versions of punk, with little to no discussions of political action. This is not to say that members of the punk community in Chicago at this time were a-political or solely seeking entertainment, but the majority of shows did not breach the topic of politics outside of zines with political commentary or merchandise with politicized imagery (Figure 2).

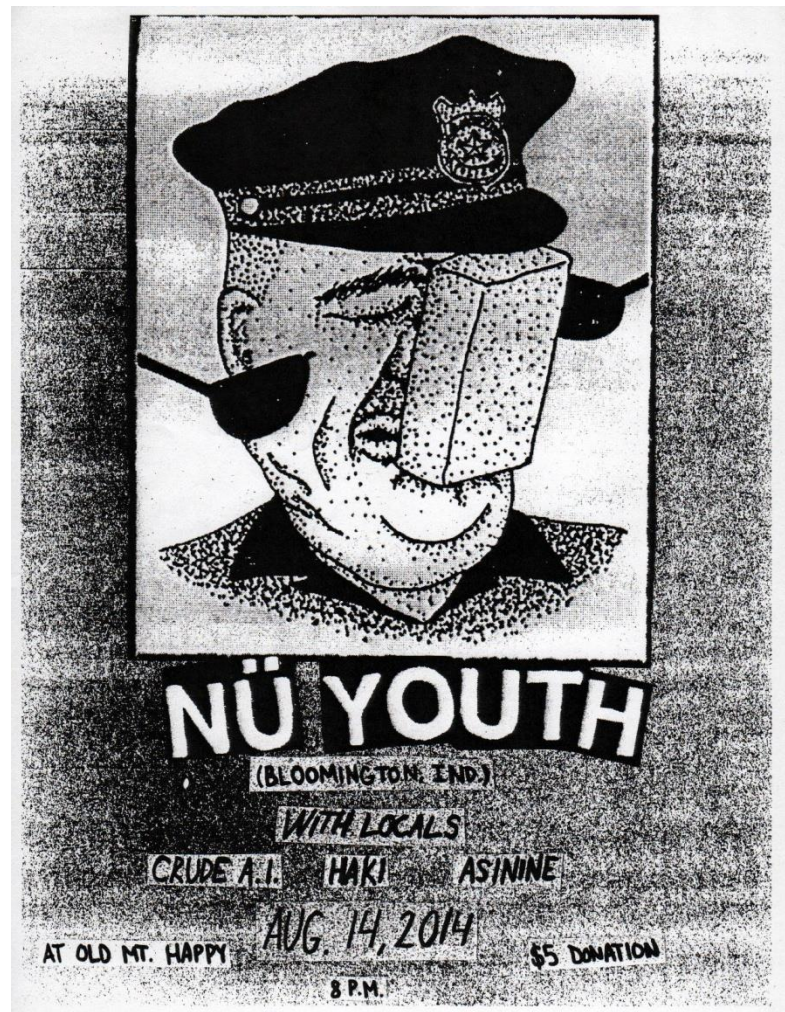


Figure 2. This flier shows a case of anti-police imagery that are popular within the punk music scene.

One interviewee, who runs an unlicensed DIY venue out of his rented home with fellow roommates, noted the repercussions still felt from the house closures,

I think we operate on a different level than the rest of society so things such as the law are avoided at all costs. Which is why we keep things secret. There was a time in Chicago punk that we didn't have to keep things secret. Addresses for venues were put all over the internet, and never once did cops show up. Despite all the illegal things we do, they are harmless and I think the law just doesn't care. But in 2012 when NATO summits happened in Chicago the police did a widespread crackdown on anything deemed radical. I believe they were preemptively trying to scare anarchists and other radicals away from organizing protests so they targeted punk venues. Multiple show spaces were shut down in ways we had never seen before. There was even a public police report where they admitted they sent undercover cops to a matinee show at Permanent Records.<sup>33</sup> After the crackdown, people went further underground, such as taking address off fliers and the internet, and we haven't poked our heads out of our hiding spot since that day.

Though this was a case of mistaken identity to an extent, longstanding spaces were being ticketed and forced to stop having events over the course of a few months prior to NATO.

Another interviewee noted how the actions during the time were due to misconceptions on behalf of people in the mainstream,

Punk and hardcore has always been deemed music for bad kids and people don't like the idea that we can book shows or play music that don't follow the traditional sense of concerts and music. As much as I would love to post the address on a flier I can't. Houses in the past that have done shows have been shut down for being anarchist communes or vagrant behavior. People fear what they don't understand.

A few of the houses shut down prior to NATO were not able to reopen due to the threat of ticketing and fines. The closing of these punk houses led the punk community, though to a lesser extent, to experience another narrowing process like the one that happened in the middle of the 1980's.

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<sup>33</sup> (Cassello 2014) notes the officers did admit to spying at a "punk rock concert" and at the record store mentioned here by the interviewee.

The scene ebbed and flowed over the years, and by 2012 it had reached a point where the punk scene was reasonably well-integrated in regards to genres. Shows featured bands of diverse genres: hardcore bands played with pop punk and grind-core bands regularly. The scene enjoyed relative success with larger bands playing in squats and rented warehouse spaces. This thriving period of the scene caused more members of different genres of punk to cooperate to throw larger shows.

But, after NATO in 2012, the DIY punk scene in Chicago has continued to remain discrete due to issues resulting in the closures of show houses. Closures of DIY spaces post-NATO primarily came in three forms: self-closure, police enforced shutdown, and eviction. Though instances of houses shutting down completely during this time were rare, participants within the scene continue to reference failed spaces when justifying their attempts to avoid detection and imposing rules on house shows,

People disrespect their neighbors and then of course they have to stop. [That house] shut down for a bit too when they let a show get too crazy. Someone ended up peeing through a neighbor's window! Worst part was it was a kid's room. Obviously an accident, but still people don't want you pissing on their kids. They had had enough so if they didn't cool it they would have been shut down by the police.

People attending shows at this house were allowed to roam around the alley way behind the house and sit on the front steps smoking and drinking. Shows regularly went on past 11pm and afterwards people would continue to drink and talk loudly into the night. The house in question was run with few rules and primarily catered to art school students looking to have parties with live music as one interviewee noted, "Every time I would go to shows there, there was this separation between the upstairs where people were just drinking and smoking and the basement where the show was happening." In this case, the residents of the house quit hosting

events to appease their neighbors and avoid being reported to the police, but only after their neighbors threatened to call their landlord. They resumed hosting shows around three months later, but when they reopened they had changed their methods for hosting events. During the time they were closed, they began to repair the relationship they had with their neighbors.<sup>34</sup> The house started ensuring that, other than the noise from the bands, there was little to no evidence of the events taking place. Bending to the will of neighbors was a sign of the times within the Chicago punk community as the number of spaces to play was dwindling.

Another occurrence that pushes DIY spaces into secrecy is the fear that a landlord will be informed of the illegal shows. Due to the illegal nature of unlicensed venues, landlords tend to see house shows in a negative light.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, shows can leave behind damage to the property in their wake (Figure 3). One interviewee noted, when asked about the damage seen at venues during shows "Someone started crowd surfing and when they got to the ceiling fan they just latched on and pretty much tore it from the ceiling." It is the fear of this type of damage and legal ramifications that lead building owners to the much dreaded eviction for violating tenants.

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<sup>34</sup> (Wink 2015)

<sup>35</sup> (Hauser 2016)



*Figure 3.* Raw Nerve at the Dunk Tank, an illegal venue shutdown by their landlord. An air conditioning vent is seen in the foreground of the image that had been crushed and is being held together by duct tape.

One venue was even shut down and the tenants evicted after a landlord found a flier for a show with the address to one of their rental properties in a local coffee shop. Though eviction is somewhat rare, it is still a threat that causes tension for the community. This more recent history of shutdowns and evictions in the scene have ultimately led to the continued practice of secrecy in regards to information dissemination in the Chicago DIY punk scene.

## **Conclusion**

This is the contextual climate from which I observed and participated in the Chicago DIY punk scene for the purpose of this thesis. It should be noted that the conclusions reached within this thesis are relative to the Chicago DIY punk scene during this moment in time. Outside of this particular context, the methods for maintaining a DIY community vary widely



and fluctuate often given the short time span of this primarily youth oriented subculture.<sup>36</sup>

From age restrictions at the only available licensed show spaces to being pushed out of swiftly gentrifying neighborhoods, punk has been forced to adapt for decades around the limitations placed on it by the surrounding mainstream society.<sup>37</sup> The context in which the DIY punk scene was formed and continues to exist has contributed to the ethos of DIY and the methods used to keep the community from disbanding.

The punk scene in Chicago has faced many obstacles that ultimately led to the formation of the present DIY based scene in the city. One of the more recent obstacles the scene faced was the crackdown on house venues surrounding NATO 2012 in Chicago. This event further influenced how DIY was conducted within the city, calling for more secretive information dissemination practices. Exploring the formation of the current punk scene reveals how the continued tension in dialectical movement between striving for autonomy and seeking an authentic version of punk has, from within, helped to create a structure that simultaneously repels outsiders through its methods and calls for inclusivity due to the need for new audiences for a rapidly dividing community.

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<sup>36</sup> (Schildrick & Macdonald 2006)

<sup>37</sup> (Galil 2014)

## CHAPTER 3: Authenticity

### Introduction

One evening while I was transcribing and coding interviews, I succumbed to the request of a friend who suggested taking a break to get some food with him. He chose a vegan restaurant, rather far from our normal haunts, on the other side of town. The place was very small and incredibly busy. Signs on the walls indicated that they do not accept tips because the employees are compensated with a living wage. I grabbed a table a couple had just left and relayed my order to my friend as another sign indicated we had to order at the counter. As I waited for my friend to place our order, I noticed that he and the cashier were having a conversation that involved an unusual amount of pointing at one another's shirts. The cashier, a lanky, 18-23 year old with a single earring was pointing at my friend's shirt and presumably liked it. "What was that about?" I asked him as soon as he returned. "I went up to the counter to order our food and the person at the register complimented me on my G.L.O.S.S. shirt."<sup>38</sup> I noticed he was wearing an Anti-Flag shirt and returned the compliment. It led to us chatting about Anti-Flag for a minute." Anti-Flag is a band well-known for their activism as well as their massive quantities of merchandise. G.L.O.S.S. on the other hand is a band that, though very popular, I would not describe as well-known outside of certain circles, and they have yet to grace the digital or physical storefronts of Hot Topic.<sup>39</sup> After we finished our meal, my friend went to the register to pay and yet again struck up a conversation with the cashier. Of course,

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<sup>38</sup> G.L.O.S.S. is an acronym for Girls Living Outside of Society's Shit which, in truth, could not have been a more apt band for the purposes of describing boundaries set in place between punks and the mainstream.

<sup>39</sup> Hot Topic is a store that is self-described as the "loudest store in the mall". They sell band t-shirts for major record label bands and pop culture merchandise.

upon his return I yet again asked, “And more wardrobe admiration?” He replied, “No, but kind of. He asked if I knew of any shows coming up that were good and told me he was new to Chicago. I told him about one and gave him my email to get the address and details from me once I had them.”

My friend, a promoter and band member, who I had days before watched ignore what he deemed to be a suspicious email asking about details for the very same show had just given information to a complete stranger. “Why did you trust this kid and not the guy who emailed you the other day?” I asked. He took a minute to remember what email I might be talking about before answering,

Sorry, a lot of people have emailed me about this upcoming show. That email guy had a Y mail account. What is that? I doubt this guy is a cop given the context. He isn’t just at this place hanging out asking people questions or spying, listening to people. He works here. Plus if he went through the trouble of getting a job at a vegan restaurant, piercing his ear, and getting to know current bands, he would get the information somehow. That’s dedication.

This interaction between a promoter and someone unknown to the Chicago DIY punk scene highlights the relationship between cultural competence and the use of authenticity as a boundary making mechanism. How authenticity can work as a boundary defining set of practices for the Chicago DIY punk scene begins with a discussion of the inherent exclusivity in such practices, as boundaries are created and maintained by declaring “what is” and “what isn’t” punk.<sup>40</sup> The evidence regarding claims and assertions of authenticity will be discussed by examining how the authenticity of outsiders to the scene is perceived and who is making these perceptive judgments.

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<sup>40</sup> (Cohen 1998)

To begin, authenticity is a much disputed topic in the field of anthropology and academia as a whole, with discussions ranging from the determination of “real cultures” to inquiries into what it means to be “true to oneself”.<sup>41</sup> This thesis does not seek to discredit or posit the superiority of one approach over another in regards to authenticity, but will be pursuing it as it was observed within the Chicago DIY punk scene: as a qualification determined by members of the scene an individual is attempting to join. This line of thinking grows out of the discussion of gatekeeping practices and scene boundaries with which this thesis is presently concerned. This thesis considers authenticity from an anthropological perspective and accepts it as defined by Theodossopoulos (2013: 339):

In many respects, authenticity encodes the expectation of truthful representation. It is concerned with the identity of persons and groups, the authorship of products, producers, and cultural practices, the categorical boundaries of society: “who” or “what” is “who” or “what” claims to be.<sup>42</sup>

That “who” or “what” is “who” or “what” claim to be is a concern within the scene due to the secretive nature of the unlicensed venues. Outsiders’ claims of being punk are backed up through the use markers of their knowledge, or competence of the DIY punk scene. Their claims are then met by promoters who use their own assertions of what makes an individual a punk or not. Though secrecy is not a matter of life or death for the scene, the presence of risk creates the need for promoters to ensure that they are giving information to like-minded individuals.<sup>43</sup> Risk in the Chicago DIY punk scene is noted by promoters as exposure to the wrong people on two fronts: potential closure of the unlicensed venue or inviting a person who is not cohesive

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<sup>41</sup> (Williams & Lewin 2009)

<sup>42</sup> (Theodossopoulos 2013: 339)

<sup>43</sup> (Fine & Holyfield 1996)

with the scene. One promoter noted, “ultimately it is illegal doing these types of things at unauthorized unlicensed spaces. So you got to be covert,” while others mentioned the need to keep individuals out that may drive other participants away, such as those accused of assault. By keeping unwanted individuals away, promoters are seeking to include only people who wish to actively support and help the Chicago DIY punk scene survive. New members then are those who share the same ideas for how to do punk.

One could describe the DIY punk scene in Chicago as a “community of practice.” A community of practice is defined by Lave and Wenger (1991) as a “set of relations among persons, activity, and world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice.” Wood (2008: 18) elaborates on this idea by explaining that boundaries around communities of practice are shaped by claims to membership, “which are, in turn, a part of the symbolic structure of the practice itself.” If we think of the DIY punk museum scene in Chicago as a community of practice, we can conceptualize judgements about authenticity that are used to weigh claims to membership as simultaneously doing the work of boundary marking for promoters. In other words defending their definition of the structure of the field of DIY punk allows promoters to police the borders of their scenes.

Conceptualizing the Chicago DIY punk scene as a community of practice compliments Bourdieu’s ideas about the internal structure of fields of cultural production—the structure of the symbolic universe informing class distinctions related to tastes in literature and other forms of art. Bourdieu (1996: 225) notes “to define boundaries, defend them and control entries is to defend the established order in the field,” and these boundaries in the case of the DIY punk scene in Chicago are used to keep non-members from entering the community of practice. In

this way, promoters are revealed to be defending their own versions of who punks are by establishing and defending their version of authenticity as a boundary producing set of practices. They utilize their judgements about what are authentic punk practices as a way to control who is allowed to enter the Chicago DIY punk scene. The following sections of this chapter will discuss the methods used by promoters to establish and retain their idea of who qualifies as a punk.

### **Secrecy Tactics**

The concern for letting the right people in has resulted in the reliance on pre-existing methods of information dissemination.<sup>44</sup> By relying on tried promotional methods the risk of inviting the wrong people is diminished, as one promoter notes,

To some degree, secrecy is part of promoting shows. Like I said before, you are accepting strangers into your house, so you must balance the desire to attract a large audience, to have as many people there as possible, and still keep away any undesirable characters.

The methods used to ensure that the “undesirable characters” are not let into the scene are selective promotional methods and perceptions of authenticity. The selective promotional methods employed by promoters within the punk scene will be covered first and the next section of this chapter discusses perceptions of authenticity. Three types of information dissemination were observed during the course of this research: micro-media, social media, and word-of-mouth. The dissemination of information through social media and by word-of-mouth have similar localizing effects to the use of micro-media (zines, fliers, posters, etc.).<sup>45</sup> One promoter noted his preferences,

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<sup>44</sup> (Erickson 1980: 202)

<sup>45</sup> (Hodkinson 2004: 141)

When we're talking about distributing paper fliers, I generally just try to go where the punks go. Book stores, record stores, coffee shops, thrift stores, and, of course, any shows preceding the one in question. When I still lived in the suburbs and booked the majority of my shows there, I would also go to skate parks and shopping malls and just look for the weirdest people there and hope they wouldn't be too freaked out by some stranger handing them a piece of paper like a Jehovah's witness.

When information is presented only in certain areas online or specific physical locations it only attracts people who already know to look in that area for news on events. This highlights that though everyone is considered capable of participating in DIY, it is exclusive in the sense that it is based on a community of practice, which implies a localizing effect. Exclusivity is related to the Chicago DIY punk scene as a community of practice because it requires members to be people who share the same goals and interests, which actively excludes those who don't. This localizing effect or locality implies that a certain space is occupied by certain people who participate in certain activities or practices. Wood (2008:18) describes locality as asserted through practice, which is in turn context-generative, meaning that it creates social spaces as people engage in practice and "legitimacy claims embedded in the practice itself set limits on the spaces that make up communities of practice". Locality then denotes exclusivity as it highlights difference between people and spaces, members versus outsiders, "like" versus "unlike".

At one point during research for this thesis, I tagged along with a promoter as he went around town to distribute fliers. We walked around a small area on the northwest side of the city. We walked north and stopped at a pizzeria. Even outside the closed door I could hear Cannibal Corpse, a death metal band, blaring. The promoter I was with walked in and asked if he could tape a flier to the wall. He seemed to know the person working behind the counter because they communicated very briefly, but with gestures that indicated familiarity. The other

fliers here were out of date and many of them had had pieces torn from the corners. We walked out and headed towards the next destination on foot. We passed a couple other pizzerias, but did not stop to drop fliers at any of them.

An aspect of gatekeeping methods that becomes glaringly obvious in my ride-a-long with the promoter in the story above is that scene members have “go-to places” to display information regarding upcoming shows and events. These tried and true spots for displaying information are utilized because they are assumed to be locations where like-minded individuals hang out. Promoters know that these locations are places where their fliers are most likely to be seen by people they consider to have an interest in DIY punk. According to Goffman (1959: 1), past experiences allow for the assumption “that only individuals of a particular kind are likely to be found in a given social setting” (i.e. vegan restaurants, record shops, etc.). When asking about their fliering habits, promoters mentioned the places they chose based on their idea of where punks who were interested in attending would be,

“When thinking about where to promote shows, I think about where people who like that style of music like to hang out and then I drop fliers off there.”

“I usually promote with fliers by posting them at my job and local independent restaurants and shops. Usually the kinds of places that seem a bit edgier than your usual stores. Independent bookstores, pizzerias, cafes etc.”

“When I post fliers in businesses or other spaces, I try to choose businesses I would expect punks to frequent. This usually means coffee shops, record stores, and campus bulletin boards.”

These three responses were echoed by all fifteen promoters who were interviewed as well as by participants when asked where they access information about shows. Every promoter indicated their preference for places where they believed the right kinds of people hang out, with one promoter noting, “Because Chicago is such a large city, I tend to post fliers in places I



know punks frequent, which usually ends up being a handful of coffee shops and record stores in Wicker Park and Logan Square.” Promoters indicated that putting fliers in different spots was less likely to yield the desired results and was therefore a waste of time and money.

Another step promoters take to ensure that knowledge of the scene does not get into the wrong hands is the removal of venue addresses from promotional media. The addresses of houses are replaced by names given to them by the current occupants (Figure 4). The use of improper names for houses in order to disguise the unlicensed venues is a tactic used by the residents, who have seized the opportunity to turn their home into a show space.<sup>46</sup> De Certeau (1984: 105) describes tactics that subvert in this way “...by altering functionalist identity by detaching themselves from it, they create in the place itself that erosion or nowhere that the law of the other carves out within it”. The ability to make space habitable, to de Certeau (1984), is the process of making places memorable. Memory is related to the names given to spaces. Improper names allow spaces to become meeting places, destinations for people who give them meaning.<sup>47</sup> As punks subvert residential spaces, they give names to their homes, which allows for the exclusion of actual addresses within promotional information dissemination. These names act as identifiers for other members of the DIY punk community to recognize,

They become liberated spaces that can be occupied. A rich determination gives them, by means of a semantic rarefaction, the function of articulating a second, poetic geography on top of the geography of the literal, forbidden or permitted meaning.<sup>48</sup>

This placement of a second, “poetic” geography in punk is used to hide in plain sight. The use of house names, not addresses, hides the subversive activities while still allowing information

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<sup>46</sup> (de Certeau 1984)

<sup>47</sup> (de Certeau 1984: 104)

<sup>48</sup> (de Certeau 1984: 105)

about the space to be openly shared without fear of detection. This tactic allows for the formation of boundaries by the punk community to be on their own terms.

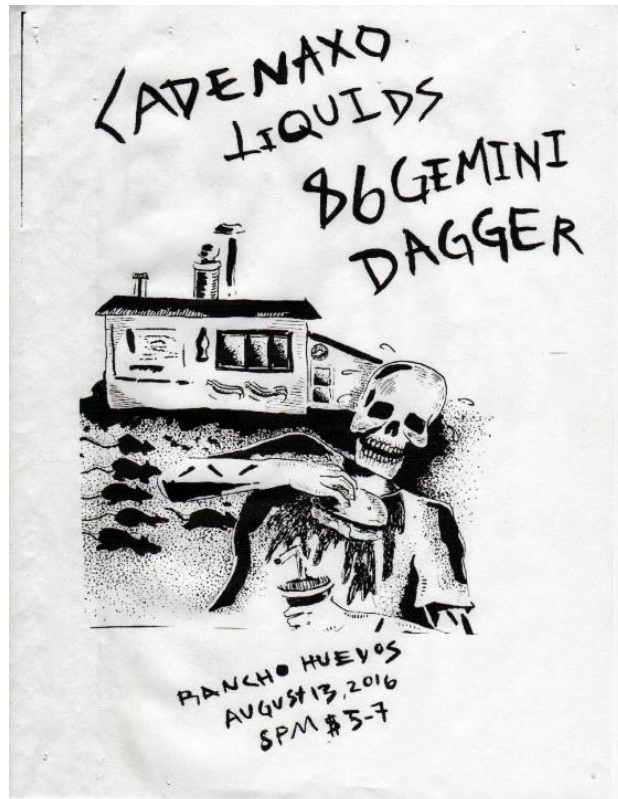


Figure 4. Flier for show at Ranchos Huevos featuring Cadenaxo, Liquids, 86 Gemini, and Dagger.

This opportunity, given that people rent, is fleeting. The use of improper names also allows promoters to impress upon members the importance of being in the know. New houses pop up somewhat frequently as people move about the city, yet the new places do not receive an introduction. They are simply named and then known to those who manage to keep up. Promoters also utilize the term “ask a punk” on fliers under the house name instead of an address, which is another element that stresses the importance of current scene knowledge. This term hints at the insular nature of promotional materials as it implies that people should

ask someone they know to be a punk for information, which one interviewee noted as a challenge, “The practice makes sense, but it often privileges those with preexisting in-group connections. A person who is new to punk, DIY, or a particular scene may not have the social connections or knowledge of in-group practices to obtain information about shows.” The assumption here is that the person viewing the flier knows someone who they can ask about the show. Outsiders to the scene are not likely to attach the correct meaning to the information seen on a flier or other micro-media, which means they fail to move forward with their inquiry.<sup>49</sup>

### **Style as Code**

“Who are you? Are you into punk? We’re into punk!” said Martin Sorrondeguy referring to how he and his friends found other punks to join their social circle, stating that they would see other kids who looked like punks and invite them.<sup>50</sup> Looking like a punk or being in the right place is no longer, if it ever was, the only determinant for entry into the Chicago DIY punk scene. Authenticity in the form of style, specifically band t-shirts and other wearable merchandise, is an indicator of belonging because of the social boundaries and physical barriers surrounding where such items can be obtained. While everyone with an interest can obtain an Anti-Flag, Descendents, or Misfits shirt online or at a mall, it is less likely that anyone outside of a DIY scene would know about or be able to obtain a Sea of Shit, G.L.O.S.S, or RASH shirt. These artifacts of the DIY punk scene have, in a way, limited circulation, which makes their potentiality as code or sign of in-group knowledge successful. Style thereby promotes the

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<sup>49</sup> (Hall 1980: 128)

<sup>50</sup> (Sorrondeguy 2015) is writing about his attempts to bring new people into the punk scene in Chicago when he was an adolescent in the early 1980’s.

autonomous pole of the field of DIY punk by establishing that DIY punk is not commercial while relaying the importance of access to knowledge and social connections.<sup>51</sup>

Bourdieu's (1984) discussion of the differences between heteronomous and autonomous poles of the field of cultural production relates to the use of style as a code and the DIY ethos within the Chicago punk scene. On one end (the heteronomous pole of the field), there is the mass production of things, commercial success, shows at larger venues, and mass distribution of recordings. These products and practices are produced and consumed in mass by mainstream society. In regards to punk, items produced in the heteronomous realm would be t-shirts for bands like the Ramones or Blink 182 - two bands that are ubiquitous and thought of as punk amongst members of the mainstream, but who are not considered to be part of the Avant-garde underground DIY punk scene (at the autonomous pole of the field). The difference between autonomous and heteronomous creations is what gives a G.L.O.S.S. shirt with limited circulation and availability more meaning for those who wish to position themselves in the Avant-garde of the punk scene than a studded leather jacket that is available for purchase at any number of retail establishments.

Commercialization of punk style can lead to the inability to ascertain an individual's actual identity as a punk. Style is less reliable when looking at conventional markers such as studded leather jackets or bullet belts because of their commodification within the mainstream. These items are no longer representative of being punk for those who wish to position themselves at the autonomous pole of the field; they are now simply fashionable items

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<sup>51</sup> (Bourdieu 1984)

that the wearer uses to engage mainstream ideas of rebelliousness.<sup>52</sup> Band t-shirts are an exception because they can confer current in-group knowledge or cultural competencies.<sup>53</sup>

The kid wearing an Anti-Flag t-shirt, who knew a current DIY punk band, and was working at a vegan restaurant passed the tests placed on unknown individuals to display authenticity as judged by someone in the scene. In punk, style only works if the clothing carries relevant meaning for members. In an interview that opens his book, *Get Shot: A visual diary 1985-2012*, Martin Sorrondeguy, of the bands Limp Wrist and Los Crudos, is asked about the existence of a “secret language” in punk,

Yeah, there were things like whichever band you had painted on your jacket said a lot about who you were. Punk works in code. People say, “Oh, punk is everywhere now.” No, no, no, no, no. If I see somebody in a Dead Kennedys or Black Flag shirt, it won’t really move me. But if you have a Jump Off a Building pin or a Destino Final shirt, then I see you are into it now. I love the Ramones, but a Ramones shirt does not say anything to any punk now, and if it did it would be weird to me. Back then, if you had Fang on your jacket...you were a motherfucker. I hate to say it, but for the most part, people who were into Fang were trouble.<sup>54</sup>

The code mentioned in the preceding example touches back onto the opening to this chapter in the way that style is used as a signifier of in-group knowledge or tastes. Utilizing Bourdieu (1984) when discussing style shows the relationship between the perceptions of ideological similarities with fashion choices. Clothing and other aspects of punk style are a learned code that requires individuals to have knowledge of the scene. Bourdieu (1993: 257) notes cultural competence, or aesthetic competence, in his discussion of an “aesthetes’ eye” noting,

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<sup>52</sup> (Hebdige 1979)

<sup>53</sup> (Alfrey 2003: 34) discusses how the hipster aesthetic identity is co-opted by the “uncool” masses through commercial and media representations. People with no with relationship to the community are able to access the “look”.

<sup>54</sup> (Sorrondeguy 2012: i)

Given that the work of art exists as such (i.e. as a symbolic object endowed with meaning and value) only if it is apprehended by spectators possessing the disposition and the aesthetic competence which are tacitly required, one could say that it is the aesthete's eye which constitutes the work of art as a work of art. But one must also remember immediately that this is possible only to the extent that aesthetes themselves are the product of a long exposure to artworks.

In this sense, style is capable of expressing a degree of commitment to the Chicago DIY punk scene.<sup>55</sup> Only people who have the appropriate knowledge are able to decipher deeper meaning from the material objects used as statement pieces.<sup>56</sup> During one interview, a participant noted his experience of being identified as a member of the Chicago punk scene due to his style,

I had a Minneapolis punk say to me once, 'you must be from Chicago.' I laughed it off and asked how he know to which he replied, 'well you're wearing one studded leather glove and a chain for a belt.' Got me pegged.

The ability to differentiate between scenes based on style is an example of how punks can read the code while non-members may not be able to tell the difference.<sup>57</sup> Going back to my day spent walking around with a promoter, we came across a group of seemingly twenty-somethings sprawled out on the sidewalk asking for money. All but one of them had some style of dreaded, dirty hair. All of them had patches on their clothes naming different bands. One was playing an acoustic guitar and they had a dog tied to a large backpack on the ground. They shouted for us to give them money. The promoter stuffed the fliers in the small bag he had with him, ignoring their calls. "Fucking oogles."<sup>58</sup> To the promoter those people, though clearly interested in music and some of the same bands, were very far from his idea of punk. I asked

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<sup>55</sup> (Brake 1985: 11-12); (Spencer 2008); (Bennett 1999)

<sup>56</sup> (Sklar 2013: 78)

<sup>57</sup> (Peterson & Bennett 2004)

<sup>58</sup> Oogles are a nickname given to people who are pretending to be homeless travelers, similar to gutter punks.

him while laughing due to his initial response to them, why not give them fliers? “One they won’t pay. Two they have a reputation for being horrible, using drugs, and just yeah they have a bad reputation and no money for bands.”

These oogles, though seen as falling under the greater umbrella of punk by members of the mainstream, are considered something else entirely by punks in the Chicago DIY punk community. Knowing bands like Discharge and Crass, as their patches indicated, marks them as punk, but their reputation and behavior presents the wrong type of punk for what the promoter was promoting. The promoter in this case used his own idea of punk to filter out those who challenged his ideas of who is a member of the scene he was promoting.

### **Social Relationships**

Social relationships are yet another way to express pre-existing knowledge of the DIY punk community and what it means to be a punk. The term “ask a punk”, mentioned earlier, hints at the link between social relationships and insider knowledge. “Ask a punk” assumes that the person viewing the flier or other promotional material knows a punk to ask for information regarding the advertised show (Figure 5). As one promoter mentions, “ask a punk seems to be just asking someone in the know. It’s that weird speakeasy element of punk shows.” If you know, or are friends with someone who is in the know, it is assumed that you have enough knowledge about the scene to be granted information about a show. The confirmation of social relationships has become an even more relevant method of determining authenticity as online

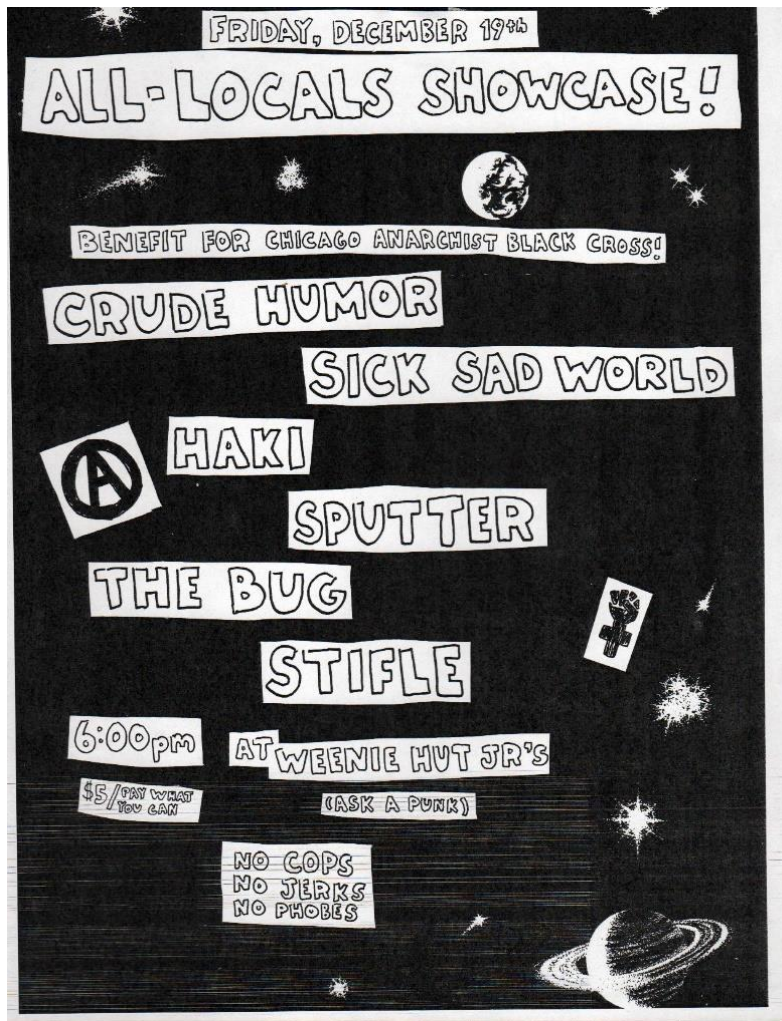


Figure 5. Flier for the Benefit show for Chicago Anarchist Black Cross featuring Crude Humor, Sick Sad World, Haki, Sputter, The Bug, and Stifle

show promotion has grown. The prevalence of social media and other digital communication methods (texts, email, etc.), and the decline of face-to-face contact, have led to stricter, more involved forms of screening questions from strangers. Online requests for information about the scene, particularly show addresses, are scrutinized due to the risk involved in divulging such sensitive information to the wrong person.<sup>59</sup> Erickson (1981) mentions the importance of group cohesion in communities that require secrecy. Cohesion in groups is a byproduct of perceptions

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<sup>59</sup> The wrong person, or wrong type of people, was taken to mean cops, landlords, or other people with ulterior motives, that lack authentic interest in the scene.



of authenticity as members of a secretive group must trust one another prior to sharing information.<sup>60</sup> One promoter in particular noted an aggressive stance on giving out information to unknown requesters,

I almost always declined everything. I never gave out addresses because I wasn't gonna be the one to accidentally invite a cop to a punk show. I also know of one instance where someone took a chance and gave a stranger an address to a show, turns out that person was a legit stalker of someone in the scene and they showed up to the show to find the person they were stalking. That's obviously an extreme example, but I didn't trust strangers enough to give them the address of shows.

The referenced interviewee was not alone in his suspicions of unknown inquirers. Other interviewees shared his sentiments noting their methods for verifying the authenticity of the person requesting information digitally,

Once or twice I've neglected to give out information to people who've requested it. It's fairly easy to spot a cop or informant on the internet. Phrasing like "I love heavy metal and would like the address to the rock concert please" or a Facebook account newly made with no friends, personal photos, or information usually serve as red flags. If it just happens to be somebody I'm not acquainted with, sometimes I'll run it past friends or other promoters to like verify their existence as a non-cop actual punker.

Promoters use of authenticity as a boundary to the DIY punk scene in Chicago has become easier to trace as they began to rely more heavily on the internet. First, much like the use of go-to places by promoters to display show information in the physical world, promoters rely on their own social media accounts on Facebook and message boards to display information. This has led promoters to primarily share information within their own pre-existing friend groups as another promoter notes, "If someone contacts me on Facebook and we have few or no mutual friends, or if they have a profile without much info, I will assume they're a cop and won't give

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<sup>60</sup> (Erickson 1981)

any info.” This shows that promoters still rely on social relationships and perceptions of knowledge through style when considering online requests for information.

One promoter discussed this as an issue that promotes the development of cliques within the DIY punk scene,

I think the internet/social media has been a net positive for DIY music, but the issues it has created (i.e. exclusivity) concern me. I think that it has become too easy for people to self-select into very homogenous groups both intentionally and unintentionally. I see this as a problem when people refuse to see points of view other than their own, or refuse to have dialogues about differences that naturally come up in life. I don't really know how to solve this problem. I think it parallels a larger trend in American culture in general.

This promoter highlights quite well how promoters use social relationships to reinforce their own ideas of who is authentically punk, in the same way that they used to judge people by their style. By only choosing to promote shows to specific people in specific locations, promoters are attempting to lessen their chances of involving people with differing opinions that may attempt to contest or change what it means to be punk to the promoter.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter sought to illuminate how claims about who is and isn't a punk are asserted by through practices that are loaded with meaning about authenticity. Judgements about authenticity (who is really punk) as performed/embodied by those seeking information about shows are used by promoters within the scene as a boundary making/maintaining practices. In this way, promoters use their judgements about who is authentically punk to enforce limits to participation thereby creating a barrier to participation—a boundary that protect their own vision of the Chicago DIY punk scene.

The boundary created by through assertions about what is and isn't authentically punk is used to check that people requesting entry into the scene meet the definition of punk determined by promoters within the current Chicago DIY punk scene. The importance of this tactic used by promoters is to keep people who seek to shut down the scene (cops, landlords, neighbors) and other members of the mainstream from infiltrating the community.<sup>61</sup> This shows that retaining the DIY punk community in Chicago as it is currently helps to manage risk while keeping promoters in a position to promote their idea of punk.

Promoters ensure the authenticity of entrants by selectively promoting information and using codes. The selective promotion of events by only choosing to promote in certain areas, online and in the physical world, narrows the exposure of information to "normals."<sup>62</sup> Punks simply define normals as members of the mainstream. Those who do manage to find the fliers and other micro-media are then required to decipher the given information. The only way to get the correct information would be knowing where to look or who to ask. Knowing where to look requires that information seekers use digital methods to search for their inquiries online. This method results in the outsider attempting to get information from the promoter who inevitably judges their authenticity based on their social relationships (social media friends lists) or online presence (pictures and other displayed information). Knowing who to ask requires further decoding in terms of finding someone who you can identify as an active member of the DIY punk scene. This involves knowing how style is representative of an individual's current knowledge of the DIY punk community.

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<sup>61</sup> (Lingel et al 2012)

<sup>62</sup> (Glass 2012)

Either method used to find information regarding the punk scene is used to reinforce the ideas of promoters about who is and who isn't to be considered a punk. Their idea of punk is reified through every stage of the process of information seeking within the scene.

Authenticity within the Chicago DIY punk scene is as much of a closed loop as the information dissemination processes that reinforce it.

## CHAPTER 4: Performance

### Introduction

Driving in a cramped car towards the practice space to pick up gear before a show, we rode past a man sitting in the park. I wouldn't have even noticed him, but one person in the car immediately pointed at the guy and shouted, though not loud enough for the people outside the car to hear, about how that individual had been "talking shit" on the online message boards. From my perspective as an outsider, the faux pas that this person had committed was criticizing the price of DIY shows. The accuser continued, "He was complaining about how I was charging seven bucks to come to a show. One of the bands isn't from the US!" Audible groans were released from the five other mouths in the car.

The story continued with more details on how the accused was on a popular message board, VLV, where he had begun to criticize promoters who charged more than five dollars for shows, claiming that it was "not very punk" to charge high rates at basement shows. Everyone in the van seemed outraged at the story and individually went off on their own rants that could barely be deciphered amongst the barrage of voices. One person, another promoter, explained how touring bands need gas money, and more often than not money for food, so they can move on to the next city and keep playing, which the offender should be aware of having been familiar with the scene. Another person stated that if the complainer needed money so bad he probably shouldn't be buying "all of that PBR". Amongst the laughter, yet another passenger chimed in, "Who cares what he has to say on message boards! Has he even been to a show in the past two years?" He went on to explain that the person they were talking about was always on the message board complaining about punk shows he never attends.

My recounting of this experience reveals how the behavior of the accused was considered “not very punk” and offensive to those involved for two reasons: 1) he was criticizing how much bands should be paid and 2) he was not currently attending shows. To the promoters in the van, the critic from the above example was not able to support his criticism because their idea of punk involved in-person participation and acceptance of social norms.<sup>63</sup> Both participation and conduct are part of the greater performance of punk in the Chicago DIY scene. Performance is a way that members of the scene can embody and signify their understanding of subcultural knowledge. Those familiar with the field are aware of the appropriate actions given their intrinsic knowledge of the scene.<sup>64</sup> An individual’s performances attempt to signify to others that they are punk and they belong in the scene.

The Chicago DIY punk scene is heavily predicated on performance. The definition of performance given by Goffman (1959: 15) is relevant to the priority placed on face-to-face interaction within the scene, specifically “all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants.” Goffman (1959: 16) further describes performance as a “‘part’ or ‘routine’, on different occasions coupled with ‘face-to-face interactions’ or participation is how insiders re-establish authenticity and create social relationships”. Therefore, performance is how members stakeout their positions within the field at the same time that they argue for their definition/version of being authentically punk.

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<sup>63</sup> (Lingel et al 2012)

<sup>64</sup> (Bourdieu 1990: 63)

Performance as explained by Goffman (1959) compliments Bourdieu's discussion of positions. As other members witness a performance repeatedly acted out by an individual, they begin to position the performer within the field at the same time that the individual's performance is also an assertion of their sense of where they position themselves in the field. By applying a position to an actor in the field of DIY punk, participants are defining the individual within the scene at the same time that the actor is doing the same. To Bourdieu (1993: 30), position-taking is contextual and ever-changing,

Every position-taking is defined in relation to the space of possibles which is objectively realized as a problematic in the form of the actual or potential position-takings corresponding to the different positions; and it receives its distinctive value from its negative relationship with the coexistent position-takings to which it is objectively related and which determine it by delimiting it. It follows from this for example, that a position-taking changes, even when the position remains identical, whenever there is change in the universe of options that are simultaneously offered for producers and consumers to choose from.

Therefore, position-taking allows members to specify and adapt to what is and is not considered punk based on the currently accepted definition in their situation.

Presence within the scene, or "being there" as one interviewee put it, allows members to change and be changed in terms of what it means to be punk. In this sense, performance defines (when evaluated by others) and expresses (when it is an assertion of the performer) how members of the DIY punk community are placed/placing themselves in positions from which they acknowledged as members. One interviewee noted her experience when she first started attending punk shows in a new town,

I think there was initially a mixed response to my attendance. Some people were initially receptive because I took photos of bands, was knowledgeable about punk, and had connections to other punk scenes. After a while, I think some people became less enthusiastic about my presence because I was very openly opinionated, which could

cause friction with the often passive aggressive nature of many in the scene, and had a specific vision of DIY shows that conflicted with the college-party vibe.

For the interviewee, she was accepted based on her performance while at new show spaces because she demonstrated her subcultural capital. This relates to Bourdieu's (1984) discussion of capital, which he notes is used by individuals to move beyond their means. For example, someone with little economic capital (money) is able to tap other forms of capital they possess such as cultural (knowledge) or social (connections) to achieve their goals. This explanation of capital is described by Malaby (2006: 146) as a "resource for action." Incorporating subcultural capital as a form of convertible capital that can be utilized to work around possible shortcomings shows how it allowed the interviewee from the above example to initially gain a position as a member without having to prove she belonged. Performance allows members of the scene to express their subcultural capital by showing their awareness of what it means to be punk.

Belief in an individual's performance arises when the members judging a performance are satisfied that the performer shares a similar position on punk. Goffman (1959: 9) states,

...each participant is expected to suppress his immediate heartfelt feelings, conveying a view of the situation which he feels the others will be able to find at least temporarily acceptable. The maintenance of this surface of agreement, this veneer of consensus, is facilitated by each participant concealing his own wants behind statements which assert values to which everyone present feels obliged to give lip service.

The assertion of values that everyone feels pressure to adhere to are defined by the promoters within the DIY punk scene who in turn are seeking to appeal to dedicated participants.

Promoters, through these expectations of performance are attempting to cultivate a supportive scene, while members feel pressure to perform according to the rules while attending the show and possibly elsewhere in order to avoid problems and potentially face being kicked out.



Therefore, adhering to the values of punk as set by the promoters of the shows is the best way to maintain a social relationship with the scene and support claims to membership.

### **Influence of Participation**

For members of the punk scene, participation is based partially on performance. Individuals use performance to continue to claim their membership within the community. Although these people may have already been initially accepted, they constantly seek to assert what they see as their position in subdivisions within the scene, or their space in the “field” in the Bourdieuean sense. As suggested by Goffman (1959), performances are not a one off show. They are used to establish consistent claims within an individual’s community. The importance of ongoing performance is demonstrated when looking at the value placed on active participation within the scene.

This is because “being there” means being able to present oneself as being on message with other members, which helps to make an individual part of the larger community instead of a bystander. Participating in DIY punk shows takes internal knowledge of how to interact with other members and perform accordingly. Interactions tend to be physical, through crowd interaction in the form of dancing or being part of the active crowd (Figure 6).<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> The active crowd in this case is the part of the crowd that is participating in the music by pushing forward or gesturing. They are not the people standing in the back away from the more chaotic interactions taking place up front.



Figure 6. Divine Right show at an unlicensed house venue.

Being part of the collective effervescence, so to speak, becomes a signifier of an individual's commitment to the group.<sup>66</sup> Fully participating and interacting with fellow members in person allows others in the group to determine your position in the scene. In a study focusing on a straightedge community, Williams (2006: 179) noted that people within the local scene did not consider people who did not participate physically at straightedge hardcore shows to be part of the community. People who participate in the scene via message boards or social media were not considered members even though they were contributing to the conversations taking place within the community. These people were described as “posers”, or

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<sup>66</sup> (Durkheim 2012); (Hancock & Lorr 2012)

people pretending to be punk—literally posing as punk.<sup>67</sup> To be part of the community then takes more than just a basic presence at events; it requires performance that is evaluated by others who mark the performer “punk.”

Being seen participating is the main aspect of performance is an assertion about one’s positionality in the field that also allows other members to judge and consider how they want to situate the performer within the social field. People who have a prolonged absence from shows were not as likely to be given room to speak on issues regarding the punk community. In the example mentioned in the opening of this chapter, the individual everyone was complaining about was arguing on the internet with members of the scene who found his statements to be out of line, or to carry less weight, due to his lack of attendance at shows. His claims were denied by the promoters because they were not supported by participation, which they found to be a defining element of the DIY punk scene in Chicago.

One occurrence that seemed to highlight the importance of show attendance was the response of younger punks in the DIY scene to older punks. Older members of the scene were, on several occasions, mocked for their lack of involvement when they tried to give advice or criticized the current scene. In one case, an older member of the scene who was performing with his band MK Ultra, mentioned his take on current shows happening in the scene.<sup>68</sup> He began by first stating that he barely goes to shows anymore due to other responsibilities. He mentioned a lack of political awareness at DIY shows that he found concerning, “When I go to shows, I’m shocked, not one fucking band says ‘fuck the war’, ‘fuck the ongoing wars’...that’s

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<sup>67</sup> (Williams 2006)

<sup>68</sup> This show was at the Beat Kitchen, a licensed venue on the north side of the city. The show was taking place as a special opening event to a documentary about the hardcore punk scene in Chicago.

what fucking matters about this shit, honestly". Though most people I observed and interviewed seemed to share this perspective, they seemed to bristle at his words. I was sitting in the back where I began to hear the younger people around me become somewhat angry, with dissenting remarks in playful tones,

"When's the last time he has been to a basement?"

"Yeah because during his day there was Charles Bronson!"<sup>69</sup>

"Right, we don't care about anything, no one has benefit shows or anything anymore since you left."

It was apparent that this member's absence, not his age, had lost him some standing with these members because to them not being there meant he was not currently supporting the DIY punk scene. The criticisms by both sides in this example revolve around a change in how punk is defined. The one side making the assertion that anti-war politics are integral to punk, while the other asserted their own positions based on active participation.

During a screening of *No Delusions*, 2016 documentary based on the Chicago DIY hardcore scene, many punks in the current DIY scene were expressing frustration over a previous documentary about the scene. The documentary, *You Weren't There: A History of Chicago Punk, 1977-1984*, rubbed many current members of the scene the wrong way as the people interviewed stated towards the end of the film that the punk scene in Chicago died after the early 1980's. When talking to current members of the scene at the screening, they stated how the *You Weren't There* interviewees assumed that once they stopped participating that the punk community ended.

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<sup>69</sup> Charles Bronson was a band in that was notorious for their sarcastic lyrics and spastic on stage performances.

“Losing touch” or “aging out” of the punk scene were common phrases heard when discussing people who no longer attend shows, but made comments about the scene. These sentiments were laced with the implication that people who were not actively participating were not allowed to express opinions, regardless of their history as a member of the scene. Chicago DIY punk scene members accept those who less frequently attend events and shows, but are less likely to take them seriously if they try to voice their opinions on matters within the scene, because unfortunately they weren’t there. The position in this case is that active participation gives members a voice by convincing influential members (the others who are also active participants) to listen.

This back and forth of position-taking seen in the DIY punk community further illuminates Bourdieu’s (1993) discussion of participants trying to define the nature of the field of cultural production. Members of the scene define what is and isn’t punk from their own perspectives. The older member, from his perspective, defined punk as having a strong relationship to anti-war politics. His position, informed by his experiences of punk throughout the 1990’s, differed from the current members who define the DIY punk scene on the basis of participation.

### **Influence of Subcultural Etiquette**

Subcultural etiquette of members of the scene is another acknowledgement that they have prior knowledge of the community. As something that must be realized, subcultural etiquette is a public performance of an individual’s knowledge about the scene through the ways they conduct themselves.

Subcultural etiquette is a step beyond showing up or just participating; it is participating with purpose from a position of experience within the field. This relates to Bourdieu's (1984) idea of competence. Competence enables individuals to display their knowledge of the scene. Leaving before all of the bands have played, standing outside during bands, not following house rules, or attempting to not pay the suggested donation price of entry are all parts of etiquette within the DIY punk scene that make impressions on other members who judge such performances. Expressions of subcultural etiquette then influence the positioning of performers as either insiders or outsiders to the DIY punk community.

The performing individual needs to create a social identity that maintains the definition of the situation at hand in order to allow other members to work with the position they are claiming.<sup>70</sup> Goffman (1959: 75) notes that an individual's position is a portrayal of knowledge of appropriate conduct given the present situation,

A status, a position, a social place is not a material thing, to be possessed and then displayed; it is a pattern of appropriate conduct, coherent, embellished, and well articulated. Performed with ease or clumsiness, awareness or not, guile or good faith, it is none the less something that must be enacted and portrayed, something that must be realized.

Performance gives other members an opportunity to evaluate the truthfulness behind the performer's claims to belonging, or put somewhat differently, the authenticity of their performance. In the beginning of this chapter, the individual who had criticized promoters online was failing to assert his claim of being an insider because of judgements made by others (those in the car making the comments) about his lack of subcultural etiquette and infrequent participation. At a show at a dry space, I witnessed another instance where a show-goer's lack

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<sup>70</sup> (Goffman 1959)

of knowledge caused other members to openly question his belonging as he cracked open a beer, “What the hell man. Dry space means no alcohol. Don’t drink it outside either.” In reaction the person who had brought the alcohol seemed incredibly embarrassed. He was in fact someone who had been going to shows for a long time, but he had never been to this house before. He was not exhibiting, as Goffman (1959: 75) notes, “an appropriate pattern of conduct.” As something that must be realized, performance is successfully acted out when the performer expresses the appropriate knowledge of the DIY punk scene.

Promoters defend their position on what it means to be punk by enforcing their vision of the scene through rules that they enforce at the shows they run. One promoter echoed the sentiments of a number of interviewees when he noted how he refused entry to people who disregarded subcultural etiquette by stating they had no money to give to bands,

Occasionally someone will show up with a case of beer they just purchased and claim they have no money for [the] entry fee, so I give them a hard time and tell them to hit the road, because that is just plain rude and inconsiderate to the touring bands who need every penny they can get.

The problem in the situation mentioned by the promoter is not that the person didn’t have the “suggested donation price”.<sup>71</sup> People are regularly let into shows for less than the price at the door. Promoters want people to be there for the bands, as a different promoter notes,

The more people you get in, the more life a scene has in terms of longevity and being able to support, like Chicago is very big so the more people that are involved, the more infrastructure there is to support bands coming through and will make shows better across the board, so the more people the better.

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<sup>71</sup> The suggested donation price at shows is the price of admission. The term “suggested donation” is used in case the police find out about the show. Claiming the show only takes donations helps to avoid more serious tickets related to illegal and unlicensed venues.

The hypothetical individual bringing in the beer without money is unaware of the disrespect perceived by promoters, or doesn't care, when he shows up with freshly bought alcohol, but claims to not have any money for the touring bands. The performer in this case is proving his idea of punk does not meet-up with that of the promoter, a disconnect which leads to either him being denied entry or receiving a bad reputation like the oogles from the preceding chapter. This relates back to the discussion of the importance of participants as consumers in the Chicago DIY punk scene mentioned in the preceding history chapter. Though DIY as a practice in the Chicago punk scene allows for a certain amount of autonomy between the scene and the mainstream it has also caused a much heavier reliance on obtaining monetary support from members in order to survive. The motivation for a promoter to kick someone out for bringing a beer instead of cash for bands is then a decision based not solely on their idea of proper conduct, but also on the need for money to keep the scene alive.

## **Conclusion**

Throughout my discussion I have separated performance into two components: subcultural etiquette and participation. The claims presented by both components must be believed for other members to trust an individual's performance which positions them within the field. Belief in performance emerges in the context of the Chicago DIY punk scene when a member's idea of punk is met by the performer. Performance is not validated by the self, it is validated by the spectators.<sup>72</sup> Here again the idea of claims versus assertions is brought into the discussion of the DIY punk scene. Claims in the case of performances are made through the actions of individuals. For instance, the offending individual in the opening example was

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<sup>72</sup> (Goffman 1959)



attempting to claim a position within the field as someone who had experience in the scene and therefore had opinions, which should be heard. However, promoters within the community contested his claims based on what they saw as his failed performance as a member. Promoters asserted that to be a member of the DIY punk community, you need to be actively involved and be knowledgeable of the rules.

This “you had to be there” attitude creates the scene by defining insiders and outsiders. I remember talking with a group of people about a show we had all attended. It was a great show that was the final performance of a rather large band within the hardcore punk scene. The crowd swelled, literally pushing people on the edges to climb the sides of the room onto shelves and long defunct radiators. A crowd-surfer was pushed closer to the ceiling due to the intense number of bodies holding him up. As the person on top of the crowd reached the center of the room where an old ceiling fan spun haphazardly, he grabbed on to it. He used the fan to hoist himself even higher above the people below. Parts of the ceiling began to crumble as the man swung around using his own weight to spin the now completely broken fan. With one last rotation the fan snapped from the ceiling exposing wires and shattering glass above the crowd.

This event was recalled several times when discussing the shows that used to take place at this venue. Being there became a point of pride. Members of the scene in attendance that night recall with reverence how wild it became. This was a show that, in the minds of those who were there, defined expectations. If you weren't there, you missed out on the reference point and cannot relate. “You weren't there” in this case becomes “you don't know” and therefore, you cannot take part in the discussion. “Punkness” within the DIY punk scene is about

participants showing they know how to play the game through performance, which ultimately leads to an increase of subcultural capital and power.

## CHAPTER 5: Subcultural Capital & Power

### Introduction

Sitting outside a show at an incredibly longstanding punk house on the far north side, a man approached a friend and me. We had been sitting away from the crowded back porch where everyone was smoking before the next set. Neither my friend nor I had ever met him before, but that was not unusual at shows where the promoter was a bit younger than us. He started up a conversation by asking “Where do you go?” which we interpreted as a question of our academic affiliations. My friend explained she was post-college age while I remained silent. Upon that news, he exclaimed that we both looked young and that he went to Columbia downtown.<sup>73</sup> We swiftly began to realize he was intoxicated and tried to end the conversation with silence. He kept talking despite our lack of involvement. He rambled on saying that he saw a flier for the show in a sandwich shop and came with some friends. He began to become slightly agitated with our lack of participation in his discussion. A band started playing and we quickly seized the opportunity to excuse ourselves and head back into the basement.

After the band played, we saw the same guy outside and he was obviously even more intoxicated. He had made racist comments and a couple show-goers were searching for a resident or the promoter to let them know. Everyone was staying as far away from him as they could while remaining in the backyard. He started kicking bikes that were chained to the fence separating the yard we were in from the neighboring building. People ran up and asked him to stop and he kicked another bike, this time also grabbing what appeared to be a milk crate tethered on the back of the bike and throwing it to the ground. One of the people living in the

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<sup>73</sup> Columbia College is a liberal arts college in Chicago.

house asked him politely to leave and as he walked down the gangway he punched through one of the basement windows. He was bleeding and someone escorted him to the street and told him to get away from the house. Another person threatened to make him leave physically, but others quickly diffused the situation. Nobody wanted more violence causing a spectacle in the backyard. People were quiet, but quickly began to talk about how it could be that a person like him made it to the show as he sulked off into the night. “Who gave him the address?” and “People need to stop passing out fliers at Columbia” were some of the general sentiments of the crowd discussing this stranger’s actions. Further remarks indicated that people were blaming the promoter of the show for not being discerning enough in terms of where and to whom he disseminated information. The promoter was blamed for inviting “randoms” or unknown people to the show. Participants also mentioned that the promoter of the show was placing the show space at risk by being careless by giving information to anyone who asked.

The person’s behavior was threatening to the show space beyond the obvious reasons that he was harassing people and damaging property. Curbing behavior considered undesirable as in this case is partially due to the threats such behavior poses to the space and people, and partly because it threatens the subcultural capital and subsequently the power of promoters. Bourdieu (1993: 43) discusses this issue and adopts the following position regarding literary authors noting “...the field of cultural production is the site of struggles in which what is at stake is the power to impose the dominant definition of the writer and therefore to delimit the population of those entitled to take part in the struggle to define the writer.” This struggle is seen in the preceding example, as the blame recoils back onto the promoter for their inability to effectively screen the area where fliers were publicly handed out or displayed. Criticism over

how a show is promoted or run can affect how other members in the local scene trust and utilize that promoter in the future. Promoters who seemingly put on bad shows, whether they are sparsely attended, unwieldy, or low-paying, reflect upon the scene as a whole.

There is power at stake within the DIY punk scene, a field of cultural production in Bourdieu's sense, and we see it at work as punks make claims and seek to define what it means to be a punk. The competition to define punk is noted as a process by Williams (2011: 89),

Power is thus a process that comes into being as humans interact with one another and invariably shape or guide (even manipulate) how others see the world. Power is never fixed but rather is always being negotiated or contested. Because power is a process, it consists of both exertion and resistance. On one side are those who have power or who are powerful because of existing social relations and cultural processes...Those who occupy powerful positions in society are thus able to exert their definitions of reality on others.

Promoters use the power afforded them through their accumulation of subcultural capital to assert their "scene-shaping" definitions of the Chicago DIY punk scene. I use the term scene-shaping to refer to how influential members of the DIY punk community in Chicago, such as promoters, utilize their position to define the parameters of the DIY punk scene. As their positions change and subcultural capital fluctuates, their power to assert their image of punk loses or gains ground. Here power is seen to form boundaries and hierarchies, demarcated by those who are considered to have authority over the subject. Promoters are able to invoke their connections in order to exert control over the scene. Subcultural capital is utilized in reinforcing assertions that create boundaries around the punk scene and the authority to define those boundaries.

Within the DIY punk community, "hipness" or subcultural capital, defined by Thornton (1996: 105) as "the linchpin of an alternative hierarchy," dictates an individual's power within

the scene by expressing the worth of their social connections and knowledge of the DIY punk scene. The alternative hierarchy of the DIY punk scene is reinforced by promoters through their assertions of what it means to be punk. One promoter noted his difficulties with running shows prior to gaining social connections within the scene,

Booking shows in Chicago was pretty difficult at the time because I was young and didn't have any connections. At [college], I used my connections from my friends' bands in Chicago and the suburbs to bring them down to play shows at different houses.

Social connections and knowledge about the scene provide promoters with the ability to dictate not only who is to be considered a member, but also where, when, and how participants interact. This level of authority is how promoters exercise their power over other members of the community. Giddens (1981: 7) defines power as "the capability to intervene in a given set of events so as in some way to alter them". In short, the "capability to intervene" for promoters is demonstrated by their use of subcultural capital to organize the scene.

### **Setting the Scene**

Promoters and people who live in punk houses, or show spaces, who coordinate and dictate when shows take place tend to be those who assert the most power within the scene. These people coordinate bands with unlicensed venues, promote the shows, and run the events, taking money at the door and making sure everything is functioning.<sup>74</sup> Their position allows them a certain amount of control over the show and the people attending, which some promoters prefer as it allows them to run the show the way they see fit,

Mostly I just want people to leave me alone and let me do it. I hate when people try to have a hand in it. It's really annoying...I like to be in charge of the show. I don't like people messing with it. I do things for a reason, so I want to be able to do it. I don't want someone trying to add a band or mess with the door money or whatever.

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<sup>74</sup> (O'Connor 2004)

This example highlights the preferred position of the promoter to exert his authority while resisting attempts by others to impinge on his control.<sup>75</sup> The control promoters have over shows exhibits how their personal preferences set the tone of the space.

Promoters control over what bands can play and where is another way they demonstrate their scene-shaping capabilities. Bands are chosen for shows depending on the promoter. Further, bands are often chosen based on their social connections to promoters as one interviewee noted, “At this stage in my life, I only really book shows for my friends, and most of my friends play in punk and hardcore bands, so I really only book shows that fall under the punk umbrella.” One younger promoter I interviewed was critical of other promoters booking practices,

Without sounding too salty, a lot of bands have a hard time getting paid attention or booked in this city if they don’t have a lot of hype behind them or aren’t famous on the internet or in the pages of Maximum Rock n Roll. A big reason I’m still booking shows is to give some exposure to bands that would have otherwise been passed over, or not given their fair shake in what is a fairly judgmental city.

As mentioned above, some promoters sought out the position in order to implement their own definitions of punk in opposition to current booking practices.

Revisiting the opening of this chapter, it can be seen that criticisms of a promoter or how a show is handled can affect their subcultural capital. If a promoter’s methods are challenged by other participants, it shows they have already begun to lose some of their influence or control over the scene. This occurs when a promoter is challenged or criticized and

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<sup>75</sup> (Williams 2011)

fails to reassert their position. One interviewee noted how she exerted her authority over shows while resisting the criticisms of her “hard stance” on who should be allowed to attend,

I would turn someone away from a show if they were known to be bigoted, a perpetrator of abuse or sexual assault/rape/harassment, or banned from shows for other reasons. I usually state on fliers or Facebook pages that bigotry and other behavior that harms others will not be tolerated at shows I book, so people have an expectation of what is not acceptable. I also think that I personally have a reputation for taking a hard stance against these things, so when people see that I’m the one booking a show, they know what kind of show it’s going to be.

As this promoter stated, show participants know that whoever is booking the show is the person who determines what is and what is not considered punk at that moment. She made it known that if you have an issue with how she runs shows there is always the option to not attend. This, however, can backfire if participants begin to take issue with the rulings of promoters. DIY punk shows in this case are a “site of struggle” where promoters must continuously reinforce their definition of the scene while appealing to members by upholding boundaries that help to delineate who and what is to be considered punk from their perspective.<sup>76</sup>

### **Case Study: Scene Split**

There are always disputes over what punk means even amongst members of a local scene. Members form factions along differences in what it means to be punk. These factions, or teams in Bourdieu’s “game,” use their own definitions of punk to guide how they play.<sup>77</sup> Disputes over what is punk can also end in a further defined subset of punk: street punks,

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<sup>76</sup> (Bourdieu 1984)

<sup>77</sup> (Bourdieu 1984)



political punks, hardcore punks, and straightedge.<sup>78</sup> The list goes on and on, further dividing the community into factions, with a considerable amount of bleeding along the boundaries as some people fail to strictly fit into certain subsets or move between them. Ideology tends to be the divisive factor.

At the beginning of my participant observation with the DIY punk community in Chicago, there was a similar ideological split within the greater scene. The resulting punk factions affected the whole scene by polarizing certain venues and pitting regular promoters against one another. The split was reminiscent of schismogenesis, referred to by Bateson (1936: 202) as “a process of differentiation in the norms of individual behavior resulting from cumulative interaction between individuals,” due to the way in which members of both factions participated in an escalating cycle of behavior that attempted to emphasize their idea of punk. One side of the split defined punk to be about providing a space which isn’t judgmental, where everyone should feel safe, with one promoter noting, “I believe punk is supposed, heavy emphasis there, to be a safe haven from mainstream society’s violence and ignorance, so I have no problem turning these people away if and when I have to.” The other faction was more concerned with what they perceived to be an ideological connection between punk and freedom of expression.

The origin of the split was an incident with one show space allowing a band, Church Whip, to play that had labeled their tour “Raping the East”.<sup>79</sup> Some members of the scene

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<sup>78</sup> These are all different genres of punks that vary based on differences in lifestyle, ideologies, or simply lyrical content. Political punks primarily see punk as a political vehicle for action. Street punks tend to promote a crass punk attitude. Hardcore punk is a more aggressive, faster version of punk.

<sup>79</sup> (Skolnik 2015b)

considered this to be inexcusable behavior, calling for the band to be removed from the show. The side calling for removal argued that the use of such language, besides being in poor taste, would be triggering for victims of sexual assault who may be present at the event. The promoter of the event decided to cancel with a statement on social media. The DIY venue responded via social media that they considered the cancellation of the show to be unacceptable censorship. Both sides argued for their definition of what the DIY punk scene meant. Those opting for removal of the band from shows stated the importance of “safe spaces” within the punk scene.<sup>80</sup> The show space and others wanting to continue with the show declared freedom of expression was the top priority for art.

The arguments became more and more heated until the groups split, with bands breaking up and smaller crowds forming on either side of the divide. The side declared “PC police” by the other started having shows with statements on fliers and in entryways to shows letting people know that certain types of behavior, such as racism, homophobia, and transphobia, were unacceptable (Figure 7).<sup>81</sup> Shows at spaces on the other side of the split became more shocking with bands such as Rectal Hygienics playing. Rectal Hygienics’ lyrics for songs such as “Transvestite” and “Heroin Whore” were considered to be gratuitously misogynistic and transphobic by some,

How are lines like "Spoiled fuck machine/ Think you're on easy street/ You're a slave to man and what he puts inside of you/ Stinking pack mule/ You smell like shit," from "Heroin Whore", the song which *Even the Flies Won't Touch You* derived its title from, supposed to be interpreted? Is it hammy shock and awe or bald misogyny? Are we supposed to sit back and appreciate this as "art" for "art's sake"?<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Safe spaces are areas where anyone can go to express themselves without fear of being challenged based on things such as their sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, or gender identity.

<sup>81</sup> “PC police” or politically correct police was an insult lobbed at promoters and members who chose to privilege the comfort of members over the freedom of expression.

<sup>82</sup> (Skolnik 2015a)

Members of the scene also noted that though they personally disagreed with their lyrics they would not say they didn't have a right to play. Other participants in the scene found no issue with what they believed to be social commentary as noted by Zettel (2015) via blogpost,

The band's lyrics are disturbing and perverted at a glancing look. Digging deeper into the album, there are spoken-word segments that offer different lenses into the group's vision: a brief, reflective speech about certain afflictions held by culturally powerful, prestigious professionals that run the USA's official institutionalized-monopolized infrastructure (medicine, law, academia); a brief testimonial (spoken by a woman) about the blunt reality that men treat women like shit.

Though Zettel (2015) suggests the band may not hate women, they were accused of merely using shock value to gain attention. Through his own example of punks trying to relate to oppressed black communities in the 1970's through the use of racist language, Donaghey (2013: 147) suggests that using shock value can obscure a band's message,

In these instances, punks identify with oppressed black communities, but use powerfully offensive and racist words to make their point. These were not intended as racist songs, whatever their ambiguity, but crucially, the use of highly offensive racist language imbued them with shock value.

Promoters and other participants in the scene who disagreed with the lyrical content of bands like Rectal Hygienics began to avoid their shows because they saw it as offensive. They would not book them or play with them as one promoter noted, "I don't care if they play, but I'm not playing with them because I don't want to play with bands I don't support. I also won't book bands that I find sketchy, so there's that."

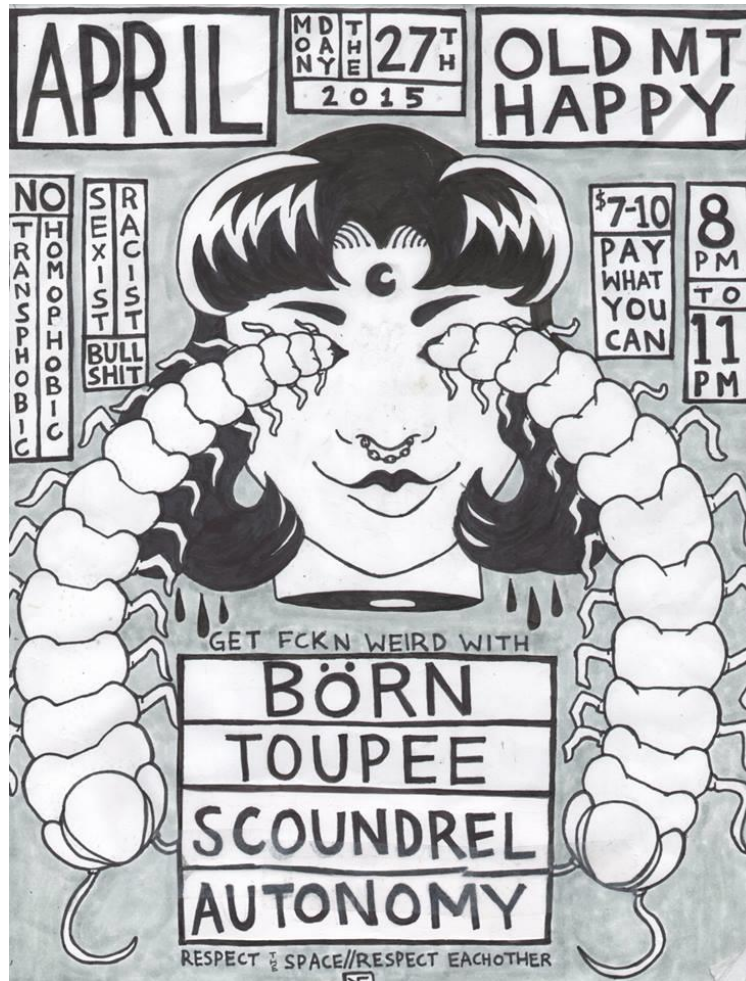


Figure 7. Flier for a show at Old Mt. Happy featuring ground rules for acceptable behavior.

This split in how the purpose of punk was defined caused the punk scene to change shape, boundaries were being redrawn, different hierarchies established, and different version of punk authenticity performed within the field. Promoters and bands with differing definitions of punk found their own spaces to play and bands to play with when they were rejected in the grand tradition of making do in the Chicago DIY punk scene.<sup>83</sup> Shows were now more likely to compete with others taking place on the same night and some members refused to go to shows

<sup>83</sup> (Nicholas 2007); (Sinker 2001)

at opposing spaces. Some people abstained from the argument all together, saying it was a personal argument between groups of friends, not indicative of the scene as a whole. The division was not city wide. Instead, the main split involved around half of the houses in the scene at the time and a handful of promoters.<sup>84</sup>

## **Discussion**

This event highlights two important features of the role that promoters play in the DIY punk scene: 1) promoters exert their authority and power over the venues to define what punk means and 2) promoters' ideas of what constitutes punk (their definition of "punk") are embodied and brought into being by the shows.

The split in this case was due to a clash of tastes within the scene and disagreement over what constitutes punk. The side that argued against the show seized the opportunity to move what were now considered their shows to different spaces, while the other continued to put on shows under their new found *raison d'être*. This particular case highlights the themes found within interviews and participant observation that related to power and subcultural capital within the scene by revealing who made these scene-shaping decisions and how they asserted their own claims.

Both sides exercised their power and subcultural capital to pull people into their own camps. This is seen in the way that such a small group of people within the scene was able to dictate a division of this scale. The power of promoters within the scene becomes very evident. Not only do they set the time and the place, they were also capable of dictating behavior at

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<sup>84</sup> The split was primarily located in the DIY scene on the north side of the city with some rumblings of issues in other parts of the city and Northwest Indiana.

shows. Promoters are responsible for establishing an environment for the scene; they set the tone. One promoter mentioned his sense of responsibility, when running events, of making the community as inclusive to anyone who was interested in joining as possible,

I'm generally most concerned with the mental, physical, and emotional well-being of bands and attendees, so there's always a risk that someone who isn't as familiar with or interested in DIY ethics or radical politics, or maybe just an all-around asshole, will somehow find out about a show and cause some trouble. I only book at venues run by people who either a) will act when action is necessary or b) trust me to make decisions in their stead, so I'm not worried about confrontation, just that it can and will happen from time to time and what that means to a young, scared kid from the suburbs or someone who is marginalized in society, and whether they'll see that as an isolated incident or indicative of the "scene" as a whole.

This promoter shows how his goal of inclusivity would possibly be tarnished if someone seeking a safe space were to experience or witness violence at one of his shows. This type of occurrence might not only lose him that participant, but also the support of members who hold him responsible for upholding the type of scene he promotes. The definition of DIY punk as having a responsibility to be as inclusive as possible to people who are, as the interviewee put it, "marginalized" was at the core of the division within the community. This determination of appropriate behavior shows that promoters, as well as people living in and running show spaces, are asserting their ideas over who is punk and how real punks act. The creation of safe spaces to this promoter meant the increased need for determining and implementing rules over what should be considered appropriate behavior at a show (Figure 8).



Figure 8. Flier for show at Dee Dee Ramone's Funky Lab that states ground rules for acceptable behavior.

This case demonstrates how new boundaries were formed through the assertion of new defining terms for authenticity and appropriate performance as well. The side that advocated for uncensored freedom of expression began to host shows for bands who refused to play at the censoring spaces. The same was true for the side advocating for safe spaces. They began to exercise more authority over who could come to shows and be part of the punk community that they were promoting.

On one side, promoters were happy to “take some asshole’s money” as long as the person was not actively being offensive at the show. This group sought to define DIY punk as an environment where freedom of expression was the main priority. They continued to embrace

an opposition to the mainstream for the same reasons punks in other factions did, but they proceeded to emphasize the importance of art that was controversial.<sup>85</sup> This controversy directly relates back to the practices of individuals within fields of cultural production who seek to define what is and what isn't art, thereby creating a rift within the scene.<sup>86</sup>

Increasingly intense actions from both sides began to occur as the now two scenes butted heads. Members of the safe space group began to "call out" bad behavior, past and present, of people requesting to enter. Promoters were beginning to face more backlash for who they let into a show. Several cases occurred during the course of observation for this study where someone who had been called out for their abusive behavior was asked to leave a show or told they would have to seek permission from the person they offended in order to attend, as one promoter noted,

There are also a lot of radical people trying to create a safe space for marginalized identities who come to punk shows. Mostly punks are people who can't relate to the outside world, so they flock to these scenes that don't judge them for not fitting in....Typically the person given the boot touched or talked to people in ways that were abusive or crossing lines. I've also seen people kicked out of shows who had abused or assaulted someone in the past, and the survivor was at said show.

Social media allowed promoters to take their vision of the Chicago DIY punk scene further by allowing them to identify offenders online. Digitally calling people out or shaming them online for their abuse also allowed these promoters to notify members of other scenes across the country of what they considered to be unacceptable behavior. Calling people out for their behavior in these cases became a way for promoters to try to spread their definition of punk

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<sup>85</sup> (Clark 2004)

<sup>86</sup> (Bourdieu 1984)



beyond their localized DIY punk scene. More to the point, this behavior allows promoters to build their scene around their idea of punk without compromising their current participants.

Being able to enforce their vision of what it means to be punk and exercise scene-shaping capabilities relies on the subcultural capital of promoters. Their power is expressed through their ability to assert their definitions of what is and what isn't punk onto participants. This is why every scene, despite all claiming the label of punk, is distinct and localized.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> (Thornton 1996)

## CHAPTER 6: Conclusion

In fall of 2015, a friend who I was attending a show with called me to let me know he was outside. I grabbed my most comfortable pair of boots preparing for the fifteen-minute walk to the house where the show was being held. As I turned around from unlocking my door, I realized my friend was waiting in his car so I walked to his window to let him know he could park anywhere. "Oh, we need to get there like now. We don't have time to walk." The show was featuring an incredibly popular band, G.L.O.S.S. Even so, I thought this was silly since the show was starting at 7 p.m. and it was only a little after 6. We were both familiar with what is known as "punk time" or the chronic inaccuracy of the start times of shows, so I asked him about his rush. "This show is going to be huge and that place is small, so we need to get there before we can't get in. Let's go!" I laughed and smugly thought of how my habit of always bringing a book to read was going to kill the next two hours of wait time.

The drive took us around five minutes including parking. When we arrived people were lined up from the basement door in the back of house, through the gangway, and out the front gate of the otherwise unassuming two-flat on Chicago's northwest side, affectionately dubbed Weenie Hut Jr.'s. Ducking into the basement through a door no taller than five and a half feet, I saw the room was already filling up. By the time 7 p.m. rolled around the basement was completely packed. The first band was starting to set up in their increasingly shrinking space as people squeezed into any open areas.

People were being turned away as the crowd inside the basement swelled. The crowd was standing chest to back all the way up into the mic stands. I found a comfortable space underneath a low hanging vent beside the hot water tanks for the building. I was in a spot

where I could not stand up entirely for the duration of the three plus hour show, but I had some horizontal space due to the pipes I was nestled against. I overheard people criticizing their friend's texting them from outside the house that they couldn't get in, "Well what do you expect! You get here 15 minutes after the listed time, you run that risk!" This statement was echoed by several as I listened from my spatially privileged post under the cobwebs.

This was surprising to hear because, as mentioned earlier in regards to performance, punk time is ubiquitous within the scene. The fear of upsetting members is often what leads promoters to starting the show later than listed, which allows for the greatest number of participants to show up and watch all of the bands. However, in the case of this G.L.O.S.S. show the promoter felt free to start the show on time because he knew the show was so successful he didn't need to pander to latecomers.

The G.L.O.S.S. show was huge, which made sense when within a year they were turning down a \$50,000 record deal from a major entertainment industry label, Epitaph Records. As Sadie Switchblade, front-woman of G.L.O.S.S. put it, the attention given to G.L.O.S.S. has changed the way they do DIY,

When we get around to recording a full-length we'll probably be doing a first press of 20,000 copies. That's not a bedroom operation anymore. While signing to a label like Epitaph would be in many ways relieving, it would probably mean the death of the feeling that so many of you have told us means so much to you. We could never do that to all of you who have been so supportive and whose kind words have meant the world to us. What I'm trying to say is that we don't have to jump into their world, we can create a new one. Thank you for being a part of this feeling. It means so much to us!<sup>88</sup>

This shows a transition from the secretive information methods that spawned after NATO in that the scene was not just looking to make do through the uses of tactics to live semi-

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<sup>88</sup> (Ambrose 2016)

autonomously from the mainstream. They were now seeking to house a larger DIY movement. The attention given to G.L.O.S.S. pushed the limitations of DIY by bringing so much attention to the scene. With this wave of attention, shows since then (within the last year) have been larger and many DIY promoters have begun to work with larger scale licensed venues around the city to host events as well as DIY spaces. Additionally, this has caused promoters to share information about shows more widely and with a more diverse group of people. As distance from the events preceding NATO 2012 grows and more attention is given to the scene for bands like G.L.O.S.S., members have become less secretive and more willing to take chances openly promoting shows. More promoters have been seeking to promote their shows to larger numbers of people by making the information public online. In a public online posting, a promoter for a large upcoming DIY punk festival in Chicago noted some rules based on the licensed venue,

- 1) They are not a fucking punk venue, just a place that lets us do things there out of the kindness of their hearts, so please be respectful of the joint and of the other people there who are regulars.
- 2) As such, there is no outside alcohol. The venue itself sells booze, so buy from them. They also sell Mexican food that is at least veggie safe with some modifications.

Secrecy of information dissemination has become less and less of an issue as promoters are now less worried about hiding and more concerned with getting the word out to as many people as possible (Figure 9).

THE FIRST ANNUAL

# INFEST- ATIONAL



FRIDAY, DECEMBER 9<sup>TH</sup>

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 10<sup>TH</sup>

1

INSCHOOL  
AMERICAN HATE  
URANIUM CLUB  
BIG BLEACH  
THE BUG  
BUGG

CRUDE HUMOR  
NEGATIVE SCANNER  
BAGHEAD  
LEMONADE  
PRYS  
TIGRESS  
CHEW  
THE PORNO GLOWS  
BLACK HOLE YOUTH

© CHITOWN FUTROL 1225 S THROOP ST  
315-25 // 5PM

BLEEDING GUMS  
UDUSIC BIB  
FYCS GEL

WEENIE HUT JR'S // 86-15 // 8PM

1.1

EYE JAMMY  
BRUISED  
FURIOUS PARTY  
WARM BODIES

© 2848 // 95-7 // HALF HOUR AFTER CHITOWN DIG

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 11<sup>TH</sup>

2

DOOZIE  
ESPEJOS  
KRYPTO  
CHERRY DEATH  
E.O.D.E.

© BRIC-4-BRAC 1354 W DIVERSITY AVE  
95-7 // NOON

FOR MORE INFO, CONTACT:  
NOTNORMALTAPES@GMAIL.COM



Figure 9. This poster for a DIY punk festival shows a mix of DIY and licensed venues.

Because DIY is a tactic utilized by the Chicago punk music scene, it produces limitations that are highly susceptible to the support of participants. Due to the dependence of the music scene on participants, promoters establish rules that take into account the expectations of the participants from whom they seek support. This reliance on participants to support their idea of punk has led promoters to employ the boundary making policies and processes explored within this thesis and the G.L.O.S.S. show would seem to have marked another shift in the Chicago DIY punk scene ushering in what may be a post-secrecy era.

I started by looking into the post-2012 NATA crackdown information dissemination practices within the DIY punk scene, looking for what many researchers have found to be exclusionary practices.<sup>89</sup> Participant observation had led me to believe that exclusion was not part of the agenda for members of the scene with which I was interacting. Everyone seemed to be welcome. Most people I knew had been to at least one show and I initially found it difficult to find a strange face at DIY punk events. The lack of fresh faces was my first red flag, which allowed me to formulate interview questions about how new people found information for shows. I began by asking participants who had been friendly to me since I started the research process. I was quickly given suggestions to ask promoters about how information is spread about shows.

I interviewed promoters and members of the DIY punk scene to understand how information dissemination practices were indicative of larger processes within their community. Through interviews and participant observations, I found promoters to be at the upper echelons of the DIY punk scene in terms of their influence. Their subcultural capital privileged

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<sup>89</sup> (Hebdige 1979); (Williams 2011); (Sklar 2013); (Thornton 1997)

them by providing them the means to showcase their definition of what it means to be punk for other members.

Promoters, being the people who connect bands with spaces to play and members with opportunities to see the bands, are considered vital to the DIY punk scene. However, their localizing processes within the scene can cause tension as secretive information dissemination practices cause instability. This take on how the DIY punk scene is structured and continues to exist despite the need for secrecy is something I found lacking in previous research. Prior research into the Chicago DIY punk scene took place primarily before the events surrounding NATO 2012, which allowed my research to explore the resulting information dissemination practices at a historical moment when mainstream society made secrecy an even more important issue for the Chicago DIY punk scene and its promoters. While style, space, and exclusionary practices were present within the Chicago punk music scene, I have also discussed a site of struggle where members rely on new participants while maintaining boundaries based on authenticity, performance, subcultural capital and power.<sup>90</sup> These boundaries are used to defend the promoter's definition of punk not only against the mainstream, but other punks as well. Since DIY allows anyone with the subcultural capital to promote their idea of punk, it creates competition within the scene for participants who are responsible for supporting the community. I discussed this using the term scene-shaping as the localizing process resulting from the Chicago punk music scene's DIY ethos.

This thesis has established authenticity as a boundary creating mechanism used by promoters as the first line of defense against their idea of punk losing ground. The need for

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<sup>90</sup> (Bourdieu 1990)

secrecy involving shows within the community partially disguises how authenticity is used as a barrier by promoters. Authenticity is ensured through the use of gatekeeping practices that diminish the opportunities of non-punks, or “normals,” to discover information allowing them to participate—a set of practices that developed in response to the 2012 NATA crackdown on punk shows.

Gatekeeping practices utilized by promoters involve how and where, as well as what, information is provided. Promoters censor the information provided on fliers. They leave out the unlicensed venue addresses, instead opting to use house names that are known by current members of the scene. This initial gatekeeping method highlights the necessity of insider knowledge to the Chicago DIY punk scene. In person dissemination of information through the use of micro-media and word-of-mouth is curbed through the use of code and selective promotion. Promoters only display information in areas they believe people interested in their style of punk will be likely to see.

Promoters further ensure their defense against “randoms” by utilizing codes distinguishable only by people “in the know”. The use of the phrase “ask a punk” that appears on fliers instead of identifying information, such as addresses, illuminates the use of code by promoters to keep individuals with dissimilar opinions away. “Ask a punk” means the person looking for information should inquire about the advertised show through someone they think would already know. Aspiring show-goers are then forced to call on their prior knowledge of who is punk and would therefore have access to the details regarding the event. However, to find the right punk, the inquirer would need to have an aligning definition of punk with the



promoter in order to proceed. Again, promoters are shown to make sure that participants in the scene are people they define as punk, who will support the scene they are trying to create.

Participants continuously face the challenge of maintaining their membership in the community by having to show they know what it takes to belong in the scene. Performance is about maintaining a happy crowd at shows to ensure that people continue to show up. This task is set upon all participants through judgments based on performance. Two aspects of performance are perceived by other members of the scene in order to establish belonging: subcultural etiquette and participation.

I primarily explored performance through the use of Goffman (1959) by looking at it as a continued action that is judged by participants in the punk scene. This relates to the definition of the situation as participants use their knowledge of the current social environment to inform their actions. To perform well and convincingly means that the actor has sufficiently expressed his or her claims to a position in the scene and it meets with the prevailing definition of what it means to be punk according to the promoter and other members at the show. Performance allows participants to consistently make claims based on their position within the punk scene. Definitions and positions are constantly in flux, which means what is considered punk now might not be later on at the next show.

Participation helps members of the DIY punk community to adapt in regards to changes to the definition of punk as their presence at shows allows them to stay in the know. As a participant's performances are continuously accepted, it reinforces their authenticity and allows them to gain subcultural capital within the scene. Performance then is a step towards

ultimately gaining more power within the scene as other members begin to see the performer as a knowledgeable member of the community.

As established throughout this thesis, promoters seek to protect their definition of punk. The position of promoters within the scene allows them to utilize their subcultural capital as a resource to exert power over other members. They are given the authority over what it means to be punk for the rest of the members at their events due to their accrued subcultural capital. Promoters choose bands, select venues, and advertise the shows in accordance with their own definition of punk, while trying to pander to members. Post-NATO 2012, the DIY punk scene in Chicago was a site of struggle where the power of promoters to express their scene-shaping abilities fluctuated according to their subcultural capital.<sup>91</sup> Promoters during this time were given more power due to the secretive information dissemination practices that spawned from those events, which gave them greater scene-shaping abilities based on their subcultural capital. The scene-shaping of promoters results in distinct local DIY punk communities that have differing ideas on what it means to be punk. As seen in the presented case study, scene splits occur due to the authority given to members by the DIY ethos. Promoters then seek like-minded members accordingly, forming smaller factions within the greater community of DIY punk.

Looking beyond this initial research, I would like to focus in greater detail on the influence of social media on how promoters defend their position on what it means to be punk within a DIY scene. In future research I would like to compare how secrecy in social media has changed between the initial events following NATO 2012 and the recent G.L.O.S.S. show.

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<sup>91</sup> (Bourdieu 1993)

Observing the changing role of secrecy in scene-shaping practices between these two events has spurred my interest in how online information dissemination methods reacted to the changes within the Chicago DIY punk scene. Wrapping up my research into the Chicago DIY punk scene, I was able to contribute to previous work on DIY punk music scenes in the way I determined that the shape of the scene was structured by the judgments of promoters in the wake of NATO 2012.

The show, the space where DIY punk is practiced, is thereby defined by the promoter's idea of what is considered punk and my presence within each basement, being pushed into walls, watching with others, when horrified, the crowd split to reveal the broken leg of a mosh participant, made me known and definable by other members. I was there and "being there" presented me as someone who was "in the know" as I was able to acknowledge and reflect the expectations of show promoters, while lending support for bands within the scene. Secrecy is what ultimately led me to be able to claim a punk identity within the Chicago DIY scene because I was able to work my way through the boundaries it created, proving my belonging. Given recent events, such as the large festival featuring bands from all over the United States, and the attention given to the DIY band G.L.O.S.S. by the mainstream entertainment industry, "being there" and knowing the rules may no longer be a measure of belonging.

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