

**Platform DIY: Examining the impact of social media on cultural resistance in
contemporary DIY music**

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Abstract

DIY (“do-it-yourself”) music is a cultural form which, following in the footsteps of punk, has historically emphasised the autonomous production and distribution of music as a meaningful, “resistant” alternative to the consumption of “mainstream” popular culture. However, the new forms of value-creation within the digital economy capitalise on autonomous production in new ways: platforms like YouTube and SoundCloud thrive on “user-generated content” and “sharing”, and the literature suggests that digital labour involves a blurring of the traditional divisions between production and consumption, and between work and leisure. “DIY” activity is increasingly the norm for aspiring cultural workers and others engaged in utilising new technologies and platforms to create and share their own work. Drawing upon fieldwork with DIY music practitioners in Leeds undertaken August 2015 – December 2016, as well as upon my own long-term engagement in this field, this thesis addresses the question: what happens to DIY’s capacity to offer cultural resistance when it is increasingly normalised by, and captured within, “platform capitalism”?

I adapt Nancy Fraser’s approach to social justice (which focusses on maldistribution and misrecognition) to consider cultural resistance in terms of both inequality and issues of identity, including self-recognition. I argue that social media usage in this context has a number of pernicious effects: encouraging individualist measures of success, fostering unproductively antagonistic relationships with other scenes, promoting an unhealthy aspirational logic of optimisation, and increasing maldistribution by “deskilling” DIY practitioners. However, practitioners also resist social media norms in important ways, through imbuing platform metrics with ambiguous social meanings, maintaining a reluctance to engage fully with marketing, and through their offline activities. I argue that affordances are an important (but often mis-applied) means of understanding how the conflicting aims of platforms and users result in social media acting as a contested space of political and cultural tension. Whilst this is an examination of a musical culture, my original contributions to knowledge also relate to critical social media studies, and demonstrate that key debates and concerns (self-branding, the quantified self, hope labour) might be advanced through close attention to the ways in which platforms’ affordances and ideologies are interpreted and engaged with by specific user-groups.

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Table of Contents

Title page	1
Statement of sole authorship	3
Abstract	4
Acknowledgments	5
Table of Contents	7
Chapter 1: Research Design	
1.1 Introduction	9
1.2 Defining the “scene”	15
1.3 Data collection, research ethics, and knowledge transfer	23
1.4 Theorising cultural resistance	29
1.5 Affordances: structure and agency on social media	35
1.6 Chapter outlines	40
Chapter 2: Literature Review	
2.1 Introduction	43
2.2 Internet histories and digital economies	44
2.3 Digital labour: working hard, or hardly working?	48
2.4 Creativity, participation, and cultural work	53
2.5 Social media and subjectivity	57
2.6 Conclusion	61
Chapter 3: DIY Histories	
3.1 Introduction	62
3.2 DIY and the music industries	63
3.3 Developing a framework for analysis: DIY as a site of tension	71
3.4 Case study 1: UK post-punk (1978-83)	76
3.5 Case study 2: US post-hardcore indie (1983-88)	86
3.6 Case study 3: Riot grrrl (1989-96)	95
3.7 Conclusions	104

Chapter 4: Production and Consumption

4.1 Introduction	106
4.2 Production and empowerment in the “prosumer” age	107
4.3 Producing authenticity 1: Intimacy	114
4.4 Producing authenticity 2: Alternative economies	121
4.5 Everyday social media use and the DIY “audience commodity”	124
4.6 Conclusion	133

Chapter 5: Insularity and Openness

5.1 Introduction	135
5.2 Imagining an audience: DIY and social media metrics	137
5.3 Safety, online and offline	150
5.4 Case study: encountering other scenes online	162
5.5 Conclusion	168

Chapter 6: Community and the Individual

6.1 Introduction	171
6.2 Self-expression, representation, and relatability	171
6.3 Hierarchies of recognition and “convivial competition” in DIY	178
6.4 Taking ownership of DIY practices on social media platforms	188
6.5 Conclusion	198

Chapter 7: Resourcefulness and Refusal

7.1 Introduction	199
7.2 “It’s hard to see how you could be anything else”: DIY as the new default	200
7.3 Optimisation and social media	208
7.4 New resourcefulness, new refusal: future directions for DIY	217
7.5 Conclusion	230

Chapter 8: Conclusions

8.1 Introduction	231
8.2 Platform DIY: Capture or resistance?	231
8.3 Contributions to social media studies	236

References

241

Chapter 1: Research Design

1.1 Introduction

In this thesis I examine the relationship between “DIY” (do-it-yourself) music culture and online social media platforms. Using qualitative research methods, and drawing on data collected from interviews and observation of the Leeds DIY scene in 2015-16, I examine the changes to DIY music practice that have been brought about by the prevalence and dominance of social media platforms. Using a critical theory-inspired conceptualisation of cultural resistance, I argue that social media has significantly constrained DIY’s capacity to contribute to social justice.

The origins of DIY music are usually traced back to 1977, “the year punk broke”, although some scholars have situated this moment in a longer history of do-it-yourself culture, emphasising a pre-punk era of independent record labels (Dunn 2012, p.219), the self-publishing of political pamphlets and sci-fi fanzines (Spencer 2008, p.12), and the homemade DIY instruments of British skiffle music (McKay 1998, pp.23–24). The core tenets of DIY might be summarised by two maxims from first-wave punk, which I present here (along with my apologies to DIY and punk scholars who are no doubt tired of their over-use in introductory sections such as this one):

“This is a chord; this is another; this a third: now form a band” (Moon 1977).

“It was easy, it was cheap — go and do it” (The Desperate Bicycles 1978).

The former was presented in the first issue of punk fanzine *Sideburns*, hand-written and photocopied alongside diagrams for three guitar chords; the latter is the chorus of the second single by The Desperate Bicycles, the liner notes of which included the total cost of recording and releasing (£135), and asks the reader “why you haven’t made your single yet”. I include these examples, at risk of adding to the mythologisation of the punk “moment”, to highlight the way in which DIY might constitute both an aesthetic (i.e. the simplicity of three chords) *and* a specific mode of producing and distributing music (i.e. “go and do it”). DIY’s critique of mainstream popular music has been

similarly two-pronged, focussing on the industry's lack of concern for its artists, as well as the supposedly sub-standard and homogenous music that emanates from the industry. The pursuit of capital has often been understood as the common cause of these symptoms.

This approach bears comparison to Adorno and Horkheimer's critique of the cultural industries, and Adorno's critique of popular music specifically, in which both the mode of production *and* the aesthetics of the resultant cultural text are seen to perpetuate subordination (Horkheimer & Adorno 2002 [1944]; Adorno 2002b [1938]; Adorno 2002a [1941]). However, as I argue in Chapter 2, DIY has in practice rarely been characterised by this kind of Adornian distaste for commodification, or for popular music as a cultural phenomenon. Indeed, in some sense DIY is clearly in thrall to mass-production, understood as the power to communicate widely, quickly, and powerfully through exchangeable musical recordings; the key object of the punk's DIY expression is the commodified 7" single. Unlike participatory folk music, or, say, a community choir, which are understood as activities enjoyable primarily to those *making* the music, DIY has always emphasised music's capacity for mediated communication, potentially of a life-changing kind, and has therefore seen political importance in "getting the message out", whatever that message may be, and in reimagining the role of media in society. As I set out in Chapter 3, these means and methods have changed across the decades, as DIY has historically responded to the social and political situation at hand, and has often demonstrated a high degree of critical reflexivity in its use of technology, its engagement with the media, and its relationship to wider music culture.

The internet has radically reconfigured many aspects of life, and music (both DIY and otherwise) is no exception. Indeed, one oft-positing change is in the relationship between professional cultural industries and amateur or independent forms of creative production. David Croteau argues that "[w]hile "independent," "alternative," and "DIY" media have long existed in many forms [...], one key to the Internet's unique significance is that it provides the infrastructure necessary to facilitate the distribution of all forms of self-produced media to a potentially far-flung audience" (2006, p.341). Croteau argues that three key elements have combined in order to create this potential: affordable digital equipment for media production, broadband capable of distributing large files, and searchable web sites that distribute and promote self-produced media. Of

course, the fact that this “far-flung” distribution is *possible* does not mean that engagement with a worldwide audience is guaranteed, and it by no means assures the democratization of media landscape, but it has certainly brought about substantial change.

A 2011 survey of around 5,000 musicians by the Future of Music Coalition offers a useful insight into the ways in which the internet has changed the way that music is produced, distributed, consumed, and talked about. One question asked respondents to agree or disagree with statements concerning how “emergent technologies and the internet” have affected their music career, and the statements which respondents most readily agreed with give strong indications of the advantages and disadvantages of using the internet as a music practitioner. They point to the increased potential for self-reliance (“I can manage my career myself”), along with the difficulties arising from the resultant multi-tasking (“My day-to-day work is more about promotion”). They also acknowledge the increased communication, both with fans and other artists, as well as the difficulties brought about by this greater accessibility (“It’s more competitive than ever”) (Thomson 2012).

Whilst social media may not have been a panacea, what I wish to emphasise here is the extent to which it has *realised*, in a meaningful way, some of the core aspirations of DIY music, and has done so for a far greater number of people than punk ever managed. Helen Kennedy suggests that some of the important, study-worthy aspects of social media are “their participatory character; the invocation to share [...]; the various ways in which they can be considered intimate; and their monetisation” (2016, p.20). *Participation, sharing, and intimacy* (although perhaps not the monetisation) might equally be key concepts for understanding the ethics that have underpinned DIY music culture. The other key offering of the social web is *autonomy*, and the ability for an unprecedented amount of people to take part in the production of culture. Similarly, DIY is, or has historically been, about people who *ought to be consumers* rejecting the role prescribed to them, turning the tables on “popular culture” and becoming producers, and finding a sense of political subversion in this act. Jello Biafra, singer of seminal US punk band The Dead Kennedys, has in recent times offered the mantra: “don’t hate the media, *become* the media” (Biafra 2000). This is, broadly, the promise of DIY, and it is also the promise of the social web.

So, in this regard, DIY music and the social web might seem to be a natural fit. Critical internet and social media scholars, however, have problematized these rhetorics of user empowerment and unfettered production. They have highlighted the uneven economic relationship between a handful of platforms and their billions of users; suggested that new opportunities for autonomy might also lead to insecurity, compulsion, and self-blaming; and that the collection and application of data from our everyday communication might represent the “capture” of hitherto un-commodified dimensions of human activity. As well as all this, the peak participatory “moment” seems to be more or less over; Jin Kim points to the “institutionalisation” of YouTube, influenced by advertisers who “do not want their advertisement next to low-quality home video content” (Kim 2012, p.54).

One such critical social media study is Kuehn and Corrigan’s examination of “hope labor” as an ideological motivation for unpaid work online. In this article, their participant Mark, who writes reviews on Yelp, has “a very private, far-fetched wish” that he might get “spotted” for his talent, and compares himself to somebody “who’s in a bar-band, playin’ away, thinking maybe somebody’s gonna come in and see me” (Kuehn & Corrigan 2013, p.14). This quote acknowledges the vain hope of finding future employment online, but it also points to amateur music as the *archetypal* form of this hope, and as the place where these odds are at their unlikeliest. Of course, as Kuehn and Corrigan acknowledge, “hope” is not the only motivation for this kind of activity, and the “pleasures of social production” are real and varied (p.19), but it is true that music often involves a “training” in underpayment (Ross 2000, p.22), with hobbyists, part-timers, and aspiring would-be stars making up the “reservoir” of talent from which the cultural industries draw (Miège 1989, p.30).

Part of DIY’s approach, at least historically, has been to critique (primarily through practice) this notion of non-professional music as primarily a “talent pool”, and to place deliberate emphasis on the “pleasures of social production” as a means of highlighting its status as cultural resistance. This might mean prizing the intimacy of a small venue, and the temporary community created within it, as an end in itself, rather than seeing it as a stepping stone. It might mean acknowledging the harmful aspects of competition invoked by a music industry that celebrates stars at the expense of valorising a wider

range of creative endeavours, and opting out of that race for fame and success. It might mean seeing musical training as a manifestation of elitist distinction, and therefore emphasising an “anyone can do it” aesthetic over precise technical ability.

However, as the Future of Music Coalition survey suggests, DIY no longer has sole dominion over certain aspects of the “do-it-yourself” approach, to the extent where using the term “alternative” is perhaps no longer an appropriate description of this practice. The “tension” I have identified within DIY, as both “against” and “alongside” the music industry, might be affected in specific ways by the near-ubiquitous adoption of social media and its accompanying strategies. My primary research question, then, asks:

What impact has social media had upon DIY music’s capacity for cultural resistance?

The three key terms in this question constitute my main objects of study, and therefore require some close scholarly attention before I can move on to analysing and interpreting the changing relationship between them. I attempt to do this in the first three chapters: my definition of DIY music is constructed through a historical consideration of its relationship with popular culture and changing socio-political contexts (Chapter 3); a “layered” understanding of social media is developed through my literature review (Chapter 2); and my conceptualisation of cultural resistance is outlined in section 1.6 of this chapter. The specific parts of DIY music and social media that I focus on — i.e. my research population and sample — are outlined in the next sections of this chapter (1.2 and 1.3).

This primary research question branches out into secondary questions which address some specific aspects of the relationship between DIY practitioners and social media platforms. Whilst my thematic organisation of chapters does not quite follow these lines (instead being organised around central “tensions” in DIY), this might be considered as the elements that come together to form a compound answer to the central research question.

Firstly, how might the autonomy, self-organisation, and participation that DIY has valorised as “resistant” be *conducive* or *complementary* to new kinds of subjectivity

demanded by “platform capitalism” (Srnicek 2017a)? How might this coincide with “enterprise discourse” (Banks 2007), and with the increasing requirement upon culture workers to “self-manage”? If there are new congruities between DIY methods and platform logics, to what extent have DIY practitioners developed (or sought) new forms of practice that counter this?

Secondly, my research considers the changing relations between DIY music, the music industries, and the IT and communication industries. DIY has often been concerned with the pernicious impact of the music industry on both consumers and producers, and social web platforms have offered new, alternative means of circulating music outside of these traditional structures. However, multinational corporations such as Facebook, Google, and Twitter hold significant cultural and economic power of their own, and their practice is shaped by their own commercial imperatives. To what extent does using these platforms constitute “independence”, and to what extent does that correlate meaningfully with cultural resistance? Are these new kinds of circulation empowering, or do they create new kinds of dependence on proprietary technology? Who benefits from culture being “free” online, and where does the money go (if there is any)?

Thirdly, I seek to answer questions about the role of metrics and algorithms in DIY practitioners’ understanding of their practice. An interest in quantitative data (sales figures, the music charts, market research, and so on) has historically been a characteristic of the music industries, with this data being interpreted and utilised in order to maximise profits and out-manoeuvre competitors. Does the increased availability of metrics affect feelings of conviviality and co-operation amongst DIY practitioners? How does this relate to social media as “future-oriented” (Kuehn & Corrigan 2013) and concerned with “self-branding” (Hearn 2008)? Do metrics interfere with seeing DIY practice as qualitatively valuable *in and of itself*?

It is clear, hopefully, from the barrage of questions above, that I think social media research might fruitfully be carried out with a thorough understanding of the specific practices that are undertaken upon and through platforms — in this case, the practices of DIY music. That does not mean that the normative perspective of the research has to come from the specific user-group (indeed, I don’t think it should), but rather that the ways that platforms constrain and enable behaviours can be best understood through a

nuanced engagement with the social, political, and cultural characteristics of the research population. Users arrive on social media with specific aims and intentions, and with already-formed social groups that determine, at least in part, social and cultural norms in those environments.

DIY is a specifically germane lens through which to consider social media, I think, because many of its guiding principles seem to be congruous with social media's "disruptive" position, as outlined above, and many of the *incongruities*, which I will explore, are subtle (although some are not). Capitalism's ability to absorb critique (both political and cultural), and to re-work this critique into new forms of legitimation (Boltanski & Chiapello 2005) is highly pertinent here. In this way power can be employed not through a top-down enforcement of change, but through more subtle processes of elision. Symbols, texts, even whole domains of practice, can be "hollowed out" and co-opted, whilst still carrying strong reverberations of their previous meanings. DIY's apparent *similarity* to social media offers a specifically fruitful means by which to consider these subtleties. Where DIY "autonomy" interacts with social media "autonomy", for example, we might find a revealing portrait of the "real" role of social media — i.e. what does social media's particular "take" on autonomy enable or constrain, and why? From here it might be possible to make inferences as to the kinds of autonomy (or creativity, or empowerment, or sociality, and so on) that are experienced on social media more widely, and the role of platform capitalism in shaping our lives.

1.2 Defining the "scene"

In this section I introduce the specific Leeds DIY scene that serves as my primary research population. I provide justification for my usage of "scene" as a concept used to delineate boundaries of this cultural activity, and consider the relation between scene, subculture and genre. I then briefly describe the specific DIY scene in my research as one of many overlapping DIY scenes within Leeds, with a tentative genre preference towards what I label "indie-punk", but in which genre is *not* the primary determinant of scene boundary. I outline my online area of study as leading from this population, insofar as the platforms I study are those used by my participants and their scene.

Rather than considering DIY activity at a national level, I prioritise a fuller understanding of a single local music culture, and therefore seek a more thorough assessment of the role and usages of social media platforms across one scenic infrastructure. Choosing Leeds was partly a matter of convenience — based on my location, and my own existing position in this community — but also based on a consideration of the potential for access to a wider range of people, activities, and venues than in other nearby cities. Leeds has an active and long-standing connection to DIY, with some specific characteristics borne of the city's social and economic position, and I consider consequences for the generalisability of my research at the end of this section.

To delineate the research population and to conceptualise their practice, I use the term “scene”. The use of scene as an academic concept in cultural studies was introduced by Will Straw (1990; 2001) and Barry Shank (1994), and further explored by Andy Bennett (2004). Whilst the term masks different sociological approaches (c.f. Hesmondhalgh 2005, p.28), there are some commonalities across the “scenes” literature: a problematisation of “subculture” in an increasingly fragmented cultural landscape; an emphasis on the “overlapping” nature of scenes and the mobility of its membership; an interest in “the local” and urban space; and the use of scene to point to something more stable than the apparent flexibility of postmodern identity. Scenes can be “translocal” in two main ways; either as the communication between small, relatively non-commercial local scenes, or as the specific localisations of “global media messages” (Peterson & Bennett 2004, p.9).

Whilst Simon Frith considers “scene” to be a “fruitfully muddled” concept (1995, p.iii), David Hesmondhalgh argues it currently suffers from an “incompatible” conflict of usages, suggesting both “bounded place” as well as “complex spatial flows of musical affiliation” (2005, p.23). Hesmondhalgh argues that we ought to abandon the quest for a “master-term” to categorise all socio-musical formations (p.38), and instead suggests considering “a range of different possibilities of youth affiliation, judged case by case” (p.35). For considering my research population, however, other available concepts that might replace scene seem at least equally flawed.

To use the term “subculture” would be to take at face value the claims to alterity made by scene members, and given the middle-class status of many practitioners, it would also seem to underplay the extent to which engagement in the scene can provide cultural and social capital, and can also act as a pathway to the cultural industries. Subculture’s connotations of youth, deviance, and resistance-through-style (Clarke 2006 [1976]; Hebdige 1979) are all a poor fit for the practitioners and activities in my study. Literature on “neo-tribes”, which places emphasis on the “unstable and shifting cultural affiliations” (Bennett 1999, p.605) of postmodern consumerism and identity construction seems to me ill-equipped to consider the life-long commitments of DIY practitioners and the *solidity* of identity which this offers. Networks (and actor-network theory) have also been used in the study of music communities, most notably by Nick Crossley in his studies of punk and post-punk networks (2009; 2015). Whilst this might be helpful in identifying central and peripheral “nodes” in a given music community, it seems limited in its capacity to consider how cultural change might occur *without* a significant change in group membership, which is the specific focus of my study.

Hesmondhalgh offers “genre” as one potential means of theorising the relationship between musical texts and social formation (2005, pp.32–35; drawing on Toynbee 2000). Whilst genre plays a role, and does shape my definition of the scene, I argue that it does not act as participants’ primary guarantor of authenticity, and is not the central means by which they understand their own practice. It is a fairly specific characteristic of DIY that it finds the social *behind* the text as more important than the text itself, and this leads to a tolerance of and supportiveness towards multiple genres. There are some aesthetic tendencies and taboos, of course — lengthy, unwieldy guitar solos are a rarity — but even these might be permitted if the band are “nice people, really”, or are politicising the practice in some way (e.g., a white man playing a guitar solo is less culturally resistant than a queer woman of colour displaying technical mastery over an instrument primarily associated with heteronormative machismo). Scene is the most appropriate means of grouping these social and cultural connections, some of which are DIY-specific and, as I outline below, I think the idea of “belonging” to a scene also captures the local and trans-local connections which are crucial to DIY.

There are a couple of other aspects of literature on scenes that also seem well-suited to my study. Firstly, it points towards the contradictions necessary in maintaining and re-

producing the scene. Frith notes that the concept of scene might usefully emphasise “banality” whilst still celebrating “some kind of opposition to dominant ideology” (2004, p.176); Kahn-Harris’ account of extreme metal fandom similarly considers the way in which scenic “mundanity” is a necessary ballast that allows for experiences of “transgression” (2004). Music communities are largely a matter of routine and repetition, and that even the most radical of scenes tends to be characterized by stability of practice.

Secondly, scene is useful for considering the materiality of place, such as in Geoff Stahl’s account of the Montreal scene, which emphasises the combination of infrastructure, venues, and other non-human actors that make up a scene (2004). Becker, writing on jazz scenes, sees “place” as “the combination of physical space and social and financial arrangements” (2004, p.26), and shows how these factors prevented his jazz musician colleagues from performing as freely as they would have wished. Scene is also good for highlighting music culture’s tendency to “cluster” in specific areas (Florida & Jackson 2010). This helps us to consider that part of the work of scenes is in creating conditions for the social reproduction of the labour force that sustains it. Issues of class and social stratification, which might often be ignored or understated in understandings of “scene” (Carrington & Wilson 2004, pp.77–78), can re-enter the picture here as something that interacts with place, institutions, and in order to shape who participates, and the symbolic content that is produced and exchanged.

Having stated my case for the usage of “scene”, the next question to address is which specific scene I am referring to. Andrew Sayer, in setting out a critical realist approach to social science methods, identifies the need for research populations to constitute a “rational abstraction” (as opposed to a “chaotic conception”), in which the researcher “isolates a significant element of the world that has some unity and autonomous force” (Sayer 1992, pp.138–43). In justifying the rationality of my particular abstraction, the notion of a scene as overlapping “circuits” helps to identify the specifically fuzzy nature of its boundaries and the fluidity of membership, but also points helpfully towards the multiple criteria which might determine its unity. I understand the scene that I study as a social group defined partly through musical genre, partly through shared social and cultural status, and partly as the actors who “belong” to a particular set of physical spaces which symbolically *embody* specific politics.

Speaking in terms of genre, I label my research population as broadly “indie-punk” in a concession to its two clearest ideological lineages, and to distinguish it from other local and trans-local DIY scenes centred around hardcore punk, electronic music, grime, folk, and so on. There is a general tendency towards guitars and away from electronic instruments, and a construction of authenticity that tends to rely on some rock notions of physicality but which also encapsulates a post-rockist enthusiasm for popular musics (see Chapter 3.1 for more on authenticity). But really, “DIY” is the appropriate label for this scene which values the *method of production and circulation* over the textual content, and which is therefore able to look “beyond” a wide range of generic signifiers. I confess, though, that my own position as a researcher-participant, very much at home in this field, may well have blinded me to some of the generic characteristics of the scene aesthetic.

Practitioners involved in this “indie-punk” scene are mostly white and middle-class, fairly mixed in terms of gender and sex (with a strong interest in feminist and queer politics), mostly vegetarian and vegan, politically left-leaning but not necessarily vocal or radical, and are a wide variety of ages between 18-40 (and tailing off sharply beyond that). In terms of social and cultural capital, then, there are commonalities that bind this scene together beyond generic affiliation.

However, above genre and status, I stress the role of place, and specifically venues. There are a number of venues that help to constitute and maintain the scene, and I argue that one in particular serves to help define my research population. Wharf Chambers is a worker’s co-operative and members’ club with a bar and multi-use venue, which is open every day, and hosts several music events each week. Located in the city centre, near the so-called “Freedom Quarter” that denotes a cluster of LGBT-oriented venues (Freedom Quarter n.d.), it emerged from a previous venue, Common Place, which was formed in the same location by a feminist collective in 2005. Temple of Boom is another important city-centre venue (without a real ‘bar’ space outside of the gig room) which tends towards heavier punk and metal; Chunk is a practice space and gig venue in Meanwood operated by a collective of bands and artists, with an emphasis on art-rock and esoteric electronic music.

There are larger venues, too, which play a role in the scene's construction. Brudenell Social Club is a two-room venue in Hyde Park (the main room holds 300 people), which has received national recognition within the live music industry (Live Music Awards 2015), and which tends to host bigger indie, pop, and rock acts. DIY music practitioners, however, had played a key role in its gradual transformation from working men's club to student-friendly venue, and so retained some sense of attachment. Whilst there were some slight feelings of disappointment that the Brudenell had "outgrown" the DIY scene, the manager of the venue was personally known to many practitioners, and would often provide favourable terms for DIY and local shows. Local pubs like the Fox and Newt in Burley, and The Fenton and The Packhorse in Woodhouse, still hosted occasional shows, but as I argue in Chapter 5, their role in the scene has diminished over the past decade. Belgrave Music Hall and Headrow House are two city-centre venues operated by one local company, which overlap with the DIY scene insofar as practitioners will attend (and play as opening acts at) shows for bigger UK and US acts but, for the most part, these two venues were seen to embody a different set of values, reflected in more self-conscious, faux-industrial interior design, as well as expensive beer and ticket prices.

Wharf Chambers in particular, though, is crucial in eliding genre difference and creating a DIY scene based on place, and was mentioned by participants in virtually every interview I conducted, regardless of any allegiances to specific genres. In particular, its status as a co-operatively run, queer-friendly venue, with a safer spaces policy, vegan food, and relatively affordable prices, allows it to stand in for and symbolise the values held by the scene. Broadly, *if it happens at Wharf, it's DIY*. This general rule points an understanding of the DIY scene as multitudinous; even as different nights brought in overlapping but distinct crowds, the sense of DIY as a coherent scene hinges on a shared *affinity with* and *attachment to* place. This also demonstrates how local and trans-local notions of the DIY scene might relate — through similar experiences of attachment to DIY venues across the country (and beyond), members of the UK-wide DIY scene can feel as though they "belong" at Wharf, even though they may only visit once a year when touring. Scenes without a comparable venue might feel attachment in the form of aspiration to create a venue along similar lines — indeed, Wharf often serves as a model for those seeking a stable "home" for DIY in their own area.

Whilst Petersen and Bennett argues for a three-tier division of scenes as “local, trans-local and virtual”, this seems to me rather of its moment (2004). The idea of a separate “virtual” scene is for the most part is a promissory borne of internet hype, and in the majority of music scenes (including mine) online communication is used to strengthen local connections, and to elide the distance between the local and the trans-local. Whilst there are specific characteristics of this online scenic communication, and specific new intrusions and obstacles, I argue that these have significant and circular consequences in the offline “local” scene, and therefore to keep the “virtual” separate seems unhelpful in understanding that relation.

In tracing this scene online, I follow other digital researchers in thinking that the boundary of online study ought to follow the usage pattern of the research population being observed (Stirling 2016, p.63). Nancy Baym uses the metaphor of the “pub crawl” to consider how the most appropriate object of study is not one single online institution amongst many, but the meanings created by a set of actors who traverse across these spaces (2007). My focus in terms of online platforms, then, was initially determined through my own prior knowledge of commonly-used sites within the scene, and was further shaped by information gained through my interviews and observations. In keeping with this, I have followed the scene, as an abstraction, rather than individuals. So, I have focused on platforms where members of the scene are in communication (i.e. social media platforms), and where music is hosted and consumed, and excluded sites which, whilst regularly used by practitioners, do not contribute to the maintenance of the scene in a meaningful way (e.g. Amazon or Tesco Online).

The most commonly-used site was Facebook, and Facebook Pages (which has a standalone app but is within the Facebook ecosystem). All of my participants had some degree of administrative control over a Facebook Page — for their band, solo music project, gig promotion, record label, venue, studio, practice space, and in many cases several of the above — and the majority also maintained a personal Facebook profile. Twitter was the next most popular general-purpose social media platform, although usage here was more varied and several participants claimed to not really “get” its purpose.

The area of the social web most specific to the scene is music-hosting sites. Bandcamp is a privately-owned music hosting and sales platform founded in 2007, which fulfills digital music sales and mediates sales of physical goods, and almost all my participants had access to at least one artist or label page on the site. Whilst Bandcamp has links to Silicon Valley through its CEO and early investors, it has a reputation for being “indie” and artist-friendly and is, unlike other comparable music streaming services, regularly turning a profit. SoundCloud offers similar services (although emphasises streaming and embedding capabilities, rather than sales), but was used by fewer participants and had more “industry” associations, and was considered primarily to be a home for electronic music genres.

Music streaming platforms such as Spotify, iTunes/Apple Music, Google Play, and so on, were less central to the scene, since they generally do not allow the kind of free, instant account-creation and music-uploading that characterises Bandcamp and SoundCloud. Rather, these platforms have aimed to get bigger labels and publishers on board in an attempt to create a music catalogue that will appeal to a broad consumer base; independent artists are required to go through third-party distributors (such as Record Union or Tunecore), most of which charge annual music registration fees, and to then wait for their music to be approved and uploaded. This is changing, as Spotify playlists become an increasingly powerful form of “exposure”, and the process of dealing with these third-party distributors becomes easier (i.e. more automated) and cheaper.

YouTube offers, like Bandcamp and SoundCloud, the ability to upload material instantly and without cost, and potentially to a far greater audience than these specialist independent music sites. It was generally used by practitioners for hosting music videos for “singles” (i.e. lead tracks from releases), or other one-off videos, and wasn’t home to much intra-scene communication, I think in part because the notion of being a “YouTuber” carried connotations of narcissism and brand-building that were sometimes seen as contradictory to DIY ethics. YouTube’s parent company, Google, was part of the everyday online experience for practitioners in various forms, including email, file-sharing, scheduling, and in the prevalence of Google Search as a means of information retrieval. Of particular importance to the scene was the understanding of urban space enabled by Google Maps, and the associated information provided by Google Places.

Photo and video-centric platforms Instagram and Snapchat do not feature heavily in my research, since they were used by only a few of my participants, but they are becoming central for both everyday communication and also gathering audiences for circulating music. Conversely, micro-blogging platform Tumblr was also used by a few participants, but its heyday had been a few years earlier, and was fading from relevance at this time. Private chat applications Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp were widely used but do not feature in any detail, in part because observation of these private individual and small-group chat platforms would have been more difficult, but also because my research is concerned with DIY music as a form of culture — i.e. public communication with the potential to be widely accessible. Ticket sales sites (including the non-profit Party For The People), merchandise ordering and fulfilment sites (especially the Leeds-based Awesome Merchandise), and file-hosting sites (e.g. Dropbox) are also part of the online infrastructure that supports and shapes the scene.

Whilst we seem to be in a period of relative stability, there is no guarantee that the current key platforms of the social web will stick around — a similar research project undertaken ten or fifteen years earlier would most likely have noted the seemingly unbreakable dominance of MySpace, Livejournal, and Napster, and the prevalence of local music forums in organising and maintaining scenes. Those platforms that do last tend to meddle with site architecture incessantly, and also adapt their business models in order to keep up with competitors. With that in mind, and with the aim of sustaining the interpretative value of my research in the longer-term, I have tried to retain an awareness of the underlying consistencies across platforms — the collection and application of data; the focus on sharing and connectivity — as well as paying attention to differences in business models, platform architecture, and usages.

As a final aside: in this research I don't focus much on the specifics of the music made by my participants. My initial aim was to consider how the scene's music might be shaped or conditioned by social media platforms, but this has proved largely beyond the scope of my study. The potential impact of platforms on musical aesthetics is something that I point towards on occasion, but my methodological approach does not allow me to be confident in drawing any conclusions in this area.

1.3 Data collection, research ethics, and knowledge transfer

In this section I outline the means by which data was collected for this research, the ethical considerations involved in this research project, and the efforts I have made to initiate “knowledge transfer” between myself and the DIY music scene. I identify my own position in relation to the scene as providing a valuable source of information, observation, and social connection to participants, but also note that this impacted on my data collection in ways that may not have been beneficial. I also identify some of the specific difficulties faced when researching DIY scenes, and when doing internet research.

My involvement in DIY music goes back over a decade, and has played a more formative role in my life than almost anything else I can think of — DIY is a place where I have learned about politics and ethics, founded and re-enforced numerous lasting friendships, and had my most profound experiences of music, provoking both personal reflection and collective exuberance. In Bristol, the city where I grew up, to discover a local musical world apart from the charmless, extortionate pubs we had been playing in as teenagers was to discover a culture that felt valuable and powerful in a way that nothing had previously, with connections to other local and national scenes that suggested a movement at once both globally visible and intimately secret. The Bristol scene had (and still has) a particularly strong identification with feminist and queer politics, as well as with veganism, and these particular integrations of political thought and action with musical culture rang true, for me, and felt full and rich where previous posited connections with music and politics (in mainstream folk, punk, reggae, and dance) had felt shallow. Whilst I would consider myself more open to other musical and political worlds now, and more aware of DIY’s own particular foibles and flaws, the connection has nonetheless been a lasting one. Much of the last ten years has been spent, to the detriment of any other interests, playing in bands and putting on gigs, and meeting people with similar shared passions.

When my PhD (and its accompanying scholarship) brought me to Leeds in 2014, I co-founded up a non-profit promotions collective with the few friends I already half-knew through the amorphous network of DIY practitioners. It was a fantastic way to divide up

the sometimes-formidable labour of organising shows — booking bands to play, promoting the show online and off, cooking dinner for the performers (and baking cakes for the audience), running the zine stall, occasionally doing the sound (badly), and providing somewhere for the bands to sleep. That collective lasted for two years, and there was some other DIY music activity too, playing music in my own band as well as other people's projects, and attending countless shows. For the final ten months or so of my research I was living in Sheffield — an hour's train journey from Leeds — and becoming involved in that city's DIY music scene, although in more peripheral roles.

But as well as my participation in various DIY scenes, I also had a rather different set of engagements with music culture over the duration of this research. During the same month I started my PhD, I signed a recording contract with an independent label who were, unbeknownst to me at the time, in close and long-term collaboration with Caroline International — a subsidiary of Universal Music Group, and very much part of the “industry”. My musical venture, which sits somewhere between indie rock band and solo recording project, released two albums through that label in 2015, supported by frequent touring and other promotional activity. We had some press coverage in the sort of publications that even my parents had heard of — *Pitchfork*, *Rolling Stone*, *NME* — and got to meet and play with musicians that remain heroes and role-models to me (although I have local, DIY heroes too). Whilst myself and the band found this to be a level of “success” that both surprised and, at times, perturbed us, our record sales (and assorted income streams) weren't as strong as the label had anticipated, and the option to extend my contract wasn't taken up. Our most recent album was self-released on cassette, and all our touring is self-organised — just as it was before signing.

Running alongside this three years of academic research then, was a strange parallel journey through the industry: I was “signed”, “hyped”, “dropped”, and then returned to DIY practice. Perhaps unsurprisingly, there were numerous times when it felt like the boundaries between research and practice were hard to define (as well as boundaries between work and leisure). This project, then, has been informed by my own experiences in ways that would be difficult to document fully. The imposition of industry third-parties into our working practice as a band — PR companies, booking agents, tour managers — gave me an understanding of how artists' autonomy is “negotiated” within music industry management structures (Banks 2007, p.7). Touring

with musicians (as well as meeting other industry workers) from the UK and the US who manage to make a living from music gave me insight into the positive experiences they have, the sacrifices they make, and the extent to which self-management has become a defining characteristic of work in this specific corner of the cultural industries (again, Banks 2007). And during this time, I found my relationship to the DIY scene felt increasingly problematic — my band was still referred to frequently in interviews and features as a “DIY” project, and yet we were really anything but, having “sold out” at least by the standard measure of signing a record contract and taking accompanying steps towards professionalisation. I felt partially responsible for (or at least compatible with) some of the kinds of individualist aspiration which I identify and examine in this thesis.

My position in the scene meant I was well-positioned to gain access to DIY music practitioners, and on the occasions where I wasn’t able to ask directly for an interview, I asked a mutual friend for an introduction. And, since I was already an “insider”, I avoided any serious issues over the “gaining and winning of consent” that Deacon et al identify as critical to the success of research interviews (2007, p.67). However, there were occasions where I suspected that my own position in the scene might have been influencing the answers I received in interviews — with participants telling me what they thought I wanted to hear, rather than giving their own perspective. Where I felt this was the case, I have avoided using this material.

Interviews constitute the primary source of data utilised in this project. I conducted 24 semi-structured interviews with 28 different practitioners between August 2015— August 2016. These practitioners included musicians, promoters, producers, sound engineers, artists, and venue staff — with most practitioners holding at least two of these roles, and three participants drawing all of their income from music-related roles. The interviews each lasted between 60-100 minutes, and were conducted in a range of locations, including practice rooms, studios, bars, cafes, and houses. The majority of interviews were one-on-one, and group interviews were conducted where time or access was limited (and in one specific case study a group interview was deliberately pursued).

Having identified a kind of “indie-punk” scene (see previous section) which served as my population for this research, I sought out participants who seemed to be helpful in

defining the “edges” of that scene — i.e. who might contribute whilst also having one foot in an overlapping scene centred more around hardcore punk, indie-pop, electronic, noise, or folk music. Whilst Deacon et al argue that theoretical sampling is a method that “abandons concern about representativeness” (2007, p.54), my claim is that *all* participants within the scene are active across more than one scene, and that by seeking difference I also managed to capture a representative “centre” of the scene, constructed through the combination of positions that comprise it. Guides to research methods often argue for the “saturation point” as the place to stop gathering data — the point at which it feels the data being collected is unsurprising. With so many variables attributable to my participants — income, age, education, musical experience, family background, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, disability, and so on — the data collected in my interviews always felt like new information. But I did feel that I had identified a number of different and broadly categorisable approaches to social media, as well as a few different approaches to my key themes of aspiration, DIY moral values, and cultural resistance, and this served to demonstrate further interviews might offer diminishing returns.

This interview material was supported by a large amount of offline observation of DIY activity. Some of this was activity I might well have been present at anyway — e.g. gigs I was promoting, playing, or attending — but I kept a fieldwork diary in order to attempt to maintain a researcher’s perspective on these “everyday” experiences. I also asked permission to attend a selection of band practices and recording sessions, but insights gleaned from these “backstage” observations — relating to creativity, group dynamics, and so on — tended to be rather removed from my primary research questions. As such, I make only minimal use of them here.

The online aspect of data collection fell into two categories. The first was based on the observation of online practice by scene members, and the integration of this material into my offline data collection. The interactions, debates, arguments, frustrations, pronouncements, and celebrations that I saw on Facebook and Twitter sometimes served as a starting point for my questions in interviews, and also later enabled me to make connections between interview material and practice. However, I didn’t request the “friendship” of any participants that I was not already Facebook Friends with, since my intention was to observe the online scene at a general level, rather than attempting to

“match up” interview material with practical examples of behaviour from those same individuals. As such, my observation of online practices draws on a more nation-wide range of activity from practitioners that I have encountered through my own history in the scene, although I paid specific attention to local activity, and to prominent Leeds-specific Facebook Groups and Pages. My intention was to maintain some sense of close relation between my online and offline samples, whilst acknowledging that the latter was closer to a “convenience sampling”.

The second category of online data I utilised was that relating to the platforms themselves. Having identified the main platforms used by my participants, I examined the ownership, architecture, and discourse of these platforms closely using a combination of hands-on experimentation, participant-observer experience, coverage in mainstream and trade press, and academic literature. In May 2016, I set up new accounts on Facebook, Facebook Pages, Twitter, Bandcamp, and Soundcloud, in order to observe and record the step-by-step process by which new users might be inculcated into or encouraged towards specific platform usages. These sign-up processes are constantly re-worked, and so the aim here was not to replicate the experience of my participants, but to understand the aims and intentions of the platforms in question. My status as participant-observer again proved helpful since certain notifications, on Facebook Pages especially, are only visible to active accounts, and therefore being in a band with an active Page was a convenient way of seeing the same kinds of things as my participants. I also paid close attention to speculation and research concerning platforms’ changing business models, as well as their relationship to financial markets and their competitors (and collaborators).

Downes, Breeze, and Griffin have written thought-provokingly on the specific ethical considerations of conducting research with DIY cultures, including music, and they, along with informal conversations with other activist-academics, have greatly informed my own ethical approach. In their work, the issue of anonymising or pseudonymising data is examined as a power relation between researcher and participant, particularly on those occasions where participants might *want* to be named and recognised as “critical agents of social change” rather than “objects” to be observed (2013, pp.106–7).

However, in this research I have opted to anonymise my participants, since much of the material contains opinions and perspectives on other local institutions and practitioners.

This material is important to the research, but also has the potential to cause distress and ill-feeling between practitioners, and therefore I consider anonymity to be the best means of ensuring that the trust placed in me by participants is not used recklessly. Participants are numbered (P1, P2, P3, etc) in order to give the reader a clearer sense of the participant being quoted in each instance. Specific venues are referred to by name, since these would be easily identifiable in any case.

Downes et al also highlight the potential for DIY culture researchers to move beyond the “contractual model” of informed consent, in order for knowledge production to become a “collaborative process” (Downes et al. 2013, pp.112–7). Whilst I wouldn’t claim that my research is “collaborative”, there are a few ways in which I have attempted to make it a more iterative and bi-directional process.

Firstly, I have received feedback and given updates on preliminary findings through conversations at gigs, and through Twitter and Facebook. Friends and acquaintances who knew about the project would often ask how work was going, and the imposition of the gently-mocking nickname “Doctor DIY” — “not yet”, I made sure to say — speaks to the extent to which this research became part of my identity during this process. I was sometimes assumed (incorrectly) to have a specialist knowledge on how to “game” platforms or algorithms, and so further feedback was gained in the process of explaining my critical approach.

Secondly, this two-way feedback took place through the creation and circulation of three “zines”, written annually throughout my study with help from fantastic illustrators, and made available at DIY venues and “zine libraries” across the UK, as well as freely available online. The first zine acts as an informal re-statement of my research proposal, the second is an account of setting up a Facebook Page and a critical examination of the discourse found there, and the third is a summary of my findings with a specific emphasis given to potential future directions for DIY practice.

Thirdly, I offered to show a full thesis draft to all participants, via email, giving them the opportunity to make comments and critiques as they saw fit. Only a few participants took me up on the offer, with the majority preferring to engage with my findings through the zines (or not to engage at all). Unfortunately, from these few participants, I

did not receive any comments or corrections on the thesis and, given the generosity they had already shown by granting me interviews and access, I was unwilling to press them for feedback. This slightly disappointing uptake provides much for me to reflect upon in terms of planning and evaluating future research projects.

John Law argues that “since social (and natural) science investigations interfere with the world, in one way or another they always make a difference, politically and otherwise” (2004, p.7). I close this section with an affirmation that I do hope this project can “make a difference”. In considering the relationship between social media platforms and DIY music, I hope that my research will have some impact on the ways in which practitioners engage with platforms, with each other, and with the wider world. DIY music has been of huge importance to me personally, and I think it continues to offer, at its best, a strong form of resistance to social injustice. The critical examination I offer here is intended to bolster that strength. I follow Rebecca Solnit in thinking that “authentic hope requires clarity” (2006, p.20), and therefore this critical examination of DIY is not intended to be a fault-finding inquisition, but rather a consideration of the ways in which DIY practice is threatened by new forms of capitalist accumulation, put forward in the belief that these threats can be countered.

1.4 Theorising cultural resistance

In this section I seek to provide a working definition of cultural resistance, to be utilised in my critical consideration of contemporary DIY music and its relationship to social media. This sits alongside other methodological concerns, rather than within a literature review, since it relates to the means by which the research question will be answered. In working towards a definition, I proceed in four stages. Firstly, I make the case for resistance as a concept which, despite having largely fallen from favour in media and communication studies, nonetheless offers specific value for my analysis. Secondly, I distinguish my perspective from some Foucauldian accounts that find fleeting moments of resistance in the consumption of popular culture; I suggest that these accounts are overly generous and also, in an important sense, more pessimistic. Thirdly, I draw on Stephen Duncombe’s framework for identifying and categorising cultural resistance, but argue that it requires some adjustment, primarily to compensate for a reductive

conceptualisation of power, and a normative vagueness that is characteristic of much literature on “alternative” culture. Fourthly, I address these weaknesses by drawing on Nancy Fraser’s “two-dimensional” understanding of social justice, offering a definition of cultural resistance as primarily concerned with mitigating *maldistribution* and *misrecognition*.

For Abercrombie and Longhurst, discussing models of audience research, the notion of resistance is problematically reliant upon a simplistic conception of power as unidirectional and hegemonic. The Incorporation/Resistance Paradigm (IRP), as they label it, no longer reflects — if it ever did — the extent to which media has “leaked” out into everyday life, and the way in which media texts have become “intimately bound up with the construction of the person” (Abercrombie & Longhurst 1998, p.37). For the most part this convincing argument has led to “resistance” fading from view within media studies, at least in literature concerned with audiences’ capacity to read and re-make media texts. There are a couple of specific exceptions: it continues to underpin definitions of “alternative media” (Atton 2002; Downing 2003), and also appears within literature on “media resisters” — those “luddites” and “laggards” who seek to avoid, mitigate, or disrupt the influence of media, technology, and consumer electronics (Woodstock 2014; Syvertsen 2017).

I certainly agree with Abercrombie and Longhurst that “resistance” does not fully capture the variety of ways in which cultural activity can be meaningful and valuable. François Matarasso’s work has collated evidence of a wide range of benefits of arts participation, both in terms of personal well-being and social cohesion (1997); Thomas Turino similarly espouses the individual and collective benefits of musical participation specifically (2008). Hesmondhalgh and Baker’s model of “good work” in cultural labour emphasises its capacity to offer “autonomy, interest and involvement, sociality, self-esteem, self-realisation, work-life balance and security”, as well as the importance of making “good” products that might also “promote aspects of the common good” (Hesmondhalgh & Baker 2011). This demonstrates that a methodological focus on the “good” need not preclude engagement with weighty political and social questions, and these accounts draw attention to the positive aspects of cultural activity that a focus on resistance might tend to understate.

So, what does “resistance” offer, in terms of my research, that a focus on the “good” might not? The first benefit, I think, is a sense of some cultural activity as being, in Stephen Duncombe’s terms, a “stand against” (Duncombe 2017, p.176). This is also important in forming the qualitative character of the connection felt between DIY practitioners and various other groups; as I address in Chapter 3.3, this sense of oppositionality is in part what differentiates DIY from the field of community arts. The second, related, benefit of utilising “resistance” is that it suggests that this oppositional position might serve as the basis for specific forms of collectivity. Hesmondhalgh and Baker’s focus on cultural work’s capacity to promote “aspects of the common good” points towards this dimension, but doesn’t address the sense that other people might also be working towards those ends. DIY music does not constitute a social movement — its aims and practices are too varied, too contradictory — but a focus on resistance points towards DIY’s movement-esque qualities, particularly in the way that DIY practitioners might feel connections of solidarity between themselves and other practitioners. I take resistance on board, then, to emphasise DIY music’s specific connections to alterity and collectivity, and to affirm that these are worth retaining, whilst acknowledging that resistance is not the only valuable outcome of DIY activity.

Many theories of resistance tend to be implicated with a Foucauldian understanding of power as ubiquitous rather than polarised, and which “produces” rather than represses subjectivity (1991, p.194). Resistance in this context is not a separate force which counters power, since it is “never in a position of exteriority in relation to power”, and is instead mobile, contingent, and fleeting, being constituted by transitory moments within existing power relations (1998, p.91). This approach has been criticised for inadequately addressing the normative question of what kinds of power are just and unjust, and for diminishing the potential of resistance by theorising power as everywhere and nowhere, thereby failing to offer an explanation of why one might resist (Wendt 1996).

Foucault’s influence is visible in studies of resistance that attend to the “micro-practices” and “micro-politics” that fall short of organised resistance (Scott 1985; 1990; de Certeau 1984). Michel de Certeau’s work on the “practice of everyday life” considers consumerism in Western society through this lens, proposing that consumption involves a “hidden production”, in which “*ways of using*” carry meanings

that might allow consumers to work against producers' aims and intentions. A feature of de Certeau's work, as well as other scholars who find resistance in everyday activity and cultural consumption, is a strong value placed on the non-conformist tendencies of consumers, either in terms of their unpredictability (1984, p.xvii), or their capacity to take material from popular culture and reform it into bootleg media and unofficial texts (Cowman & Kaloski 1998). It often requires the ability to read media texts "against the grain", and to find resistant meanings within dominant culture. However, whilst de Certeau's account of resistance in everyday life serves as the model for optimistic accounts of everyday culture (Fiske 1989; Jenkins 1992), his own perspective is often deeply pessimistic:

Marginality is today no longer limited to minority groups, but is rather massive and pervasive; this cultural activity of the non-producers of culture [...] remains the only one possible for all those who nevertheless buy and pay for the showy products through which a productivist economy articulates itself. (1984, p.xvii)

Despite purportedly showcasing resistance, de Certeau here paints a rather bleak picture that is, in its own way, making Frankfurt School-esque judgements about the power of standardisation, the culture industry, and the near-impossibility of structural change (see Horkheimer & Adorno 2002 [1944]). The everyday resistance valorised by De Certeau emerges after the possibility for bringing about structural or systemic change has been (I think prematurely) discarded.

Stephen Duncombe offers a framework for that provides room for cultural resistance to have a greater and more systemic impact, influenced by his experiences as a punk practitioner and political activist. Duncombe's framework is based on assessing several "scales of resistance": a scale of political engagement (from unconscious to self-conscious), a scale measuring the social unit involved (an individual, a subculture, or a society), and a scale measuring results (survival, rebellion, resistance). These sliding scales are useful in considering how forms of resistance might depend on the social unit in question (i.e. individual or group). At the individual level, resistance is linked to notions of self-realisation, empowerment, and autonomy; towards the other end of the scale (bigger social units, a "larger" kind of resistance) is the building of alternative economies. At its most aspirational this approach calls for culture to be repurposed and reorganised in order to bring about a political revolution. But once we acknowledge that

much of DIY music does not directly constitute revolutionary socialist praxis (see Chapter 3), then consideration of alternative economies within this sphere might fruitfully focus on the attempts to limit the power of corporations and the state, and to restrict the ability of capital to engulf new areas of social life in order to carve out space where exploitation and alienation are minimised.

Duncombe's definition of cultural resistance is "culture that is used, consciously or unconsciously, effectively or not, to resist and/or change the dominant political, economic and/or social structure" (2002, p.5). In terms of reaching an understanding of resistance which will be methodologically useful, this is a decent starting point which requires a couple of adjustments. My definition is less generous, and raises the threshold of what constitutes resistance — I contend that activity that is both unconscious *and* ineffective cannot really be considered resistant, in a way that meaningfully distinguishes it from "non-resistant" cultural activity.

But, my definition is also a little more sceptical of DIY and "subcultural" activity as the sole or primary avenue of cultural resistance. Duncombe argues that "in a society built around the principle that we should consume what others have produced for us, throwing an illegal warehouse rave or creating an underground music level — that is, creating your own culture — takes on a rebellious resonance" (2002, p.7). However, these "underground" environments can fail to acknowledge injustices and uneven power dynamics within their borders; Julia Downes, in her ethnography of UK riot grrrl, notes that "girls and young women frequently fall short of achieving the authenticity and legitimacy dictated as necessary for full participation within subcultural spheres" (2009; see also Mullaney 2007). An emphasis on the "underground" also underplays the complexity of media landscapes that even the most subcultural practitioner moves through. Here is perhaps where Abercrombie and Longhurst's Speculative/Performance paradigm (SPP) might help us acknowledge that cultural resistance takes place across both global and local fields, which Grahn argues are "sometimes underground, sometimes above ground, and often both" (1984, p.xiv).

I also wish to address more specifically the normative issue of political orientation that tends to be left unaddressed by Duncombe and others. There is often an unspoken conflation of "underground" culture with progressive politics, which is further

complicated by a tendency to read leftist politics as more authentic or more deeply felt than other political positions: when grassroots culture is leftist, it represents the surfacing of the common political will, and when it is nationalist or populist, it represents the uncritical regurgitation of conservative mass-media discourse. A clearer articulation of the politics of resistance would allow a more thorough assessment of problematic or unhelpful elements within modes of resistance, such as the individualist libertarian implications of Thoreau's "civil disobedience" (1986 [1849]), or the racism and sexism observed by John Clarke in his study of British working-class "skins" culture (2006 [1975]). Being able to make this kind of nuanced assessment is critical to my project.

For a normative underpinning of cultural resistance, then, I draw upon Nancy Fraser's work on social injustice, and specifically her identification of "misrecognition" and "maldistribution" as twin blights upon Western society under late capitalism (2000). Fraser demonstrates that issues of redistribution and recognition are not reducible to the simplistic "folk paradigms" of "class politics" and "identity politics", which in these forms often appear to be mutually exclusive (2003, p.11). Combining Marxist and Weberian conceptualisations of societal divisions, she argues for an understanding of "two-dimensional subordination", whereby subordinated groups "suffer both maldistribution and misrecognition *in forms where neither of these injustices is an indirect effect of the other, but where both are primary and co-original*" (Fraser 2003, p.19). Importantly, Fraser identifies that recognition is not merely an issue of interpersonal ethics, moving from a Hegelian understanding to one that places "social institutions" at its heart, with the implication that maldistribution and misrecognition both occur "when institutions structure interaction according to cultural norms that impede parity of participation" (2003, p.29).

As I have argued, the positive dimensions of culture can be understated in accounts that emphasise resistance. In utilising this social justice framework, the danger is that I underplay the extent to which culture can provide deeply personal (i.e. *not* social) experiences of self-realisation and emotional development. It is important to note, then, that Fraser's "misrecognition" also includes the potential for misrecognition of the self, understood as the ways in which institutions might impede a given subject's capacity for self-recognition. The notion that there might be a "self" that can be "recognised"

without reference to the social world is problematic, and I don't make this claim. Rather, I argue that just as social and cultural norms might impede our ability to recognise the claims to justice of others, they also might lead us to internalise discourses that perpetuate our own *unjust* treatment.

Fraser's model of social justice allows for a rich understanding of the means by which power might operate along both economic and cultural lines, and how these two interact; as in, for example, the ways in which the cultural industries maintain economic inequality *and also* provide limited opportunities for representation. It also highlights the critical importance of addressing these two dimensions simultaneously. Which is not to say that they cannot be beneficially addressed individually, but rather that addressing one of these goals gives no guarantee of positively progressing the other, and may even work against it (Fraser 2009).

I define cultural resistance as *the acts, events, and spaces through which individuals or groups seek to create and change cultural meanings, with the aim of reducing misrecognition and maldistribution*. Cultural resistance can take place at the level of the text *or* the organisation — i.e. the symbolic content of the cultural product, and the conditions of its circulation — and these dimensions are often interlinked, such as in the capacity for organisational self-determination to allow a greater “autonomy” for cultural producers. Nancy Fraser's conception of social justice is useful in identifying the limited utility of “one-dimensional” resistance of the everyday resistance valorised by De Certeau, and highlights that the specific potential of “underground” or “(sub)cultural” resistance lies in its capacity to resist across two dimensions, through an awareness of and interaction with both the economic and cultural aspects of social justice.

Having defined cultural resistance and outlined its importance for my research method, there are a couple of things to note. Firstly, that forms of resistance can (and do) directly contradict and work against each other, and that this is related to the size of the social unit and the scale of resistance being attempted. An action that might be individually empowering might, for example, counteract the efforts of a community attempting to create an alternative economy. And, as Fraser notes, drawing on intersectional feminist theory (Crenshaw 1991), “individuals who are subordinated along one axis of social

division may well be dominant along another” (2003, p.26). Where appropriate I will use terms that indicate the kind of social unit involved (individual, group, community, *scene*, society) and the kind of resistance taking place (empowerment, representation, redistribution, contestation, alternative economies), in order to avoid “flattening” my conception of resistance to an uncritical, one-size-fits-all approach. Secondly, the activities that provide or comprise these resistances have causes and consequences that are historical — their impact and efficacy is dependent on the wider social and economic situation, and resistant practice perpetually redefines the terrain in which it operates. Importantly, this means that forms of resistance can be co-opted and defanged whilst still looking and feeling like resistance. My role as a researcher is to critically and sensitively consider whether this might sometimes be the case, whilst recognising the complex nature of cultural resistance, and the validity of affect (i.e feeling resistant) as carrying its own kind of value.

1.5 Affordances: structure and agency on social media

In considering the extent to which social media might have impacted DIY music’s capacity to offer cultural resistance, it is necessary to have some means by which to understand the way that social media platforms hold and exercise power to shape users’ behaviours, as well as the ways in which users might contradict these intentions, by bringing different values to bear, and by using sites in unpredictable ways. The challenge, as Slack and Wise identify, is to “find a way to understand the role of technology, [whilst] acknowledging that technology is always already a part of culture, not a cause or an effect of it” (2002, p.488). To do this I utilise the concept of affordances. The term is borrowed from ecological psychology, via design, and already has something of a storied history in ICT and social media studies. Indeed, the extent to which the term seems to require constant “patching up” or “re-imagining” suggests that the term is destined to remain an imprecise fit for the complex and idiosyncratic interactions found on social media platforms. However, I argue that a renewed conceptualization of affordances that stresses the agency manifested on both sides of the screen might offer a means of exploring the *political* nature of the tension between platforms and their users. Affordances are not the only concept I utilise toward this end, and I also consider economic and political relations between platforms and users at a

broader level, but they do constitute a key methodological approach, which I develop and explore here.

The concept of affordances has its origins in the ecological psychology of James J. Gibson (1979). Affordances are “what the environment offers an organism” (p.127), arising through interaction between the features of a landscape — i.e. an over-hanging rock is an environmental feature that might *afford* shelter for organisms whose eyes can see it, whose limbs can navigate the landscape in order to get to it, and whose body is the appropriate size and shape to fit underneath it. Norman (2002 [1988]) adapts the term affordances in order to consider the communicative aspects of the design of everyday objects, and it is this perspective that most applications of affordance theory in the field of ICT draw upon. Norman argues that human-designed objects should make their “appropriate” uses (i.e. affordances) clear in order to prevent accidental misuse, assuring that “when you have trouble with things [...] it’s not your fault. Don’t blame yourself: blame the designer” (2002, p.x). Bad design, for Norman, is the accidental inclusion of “perceived” affordances which hide the “real” ones — e.g. a specific door-handle shape giving the mistaken impression that we should push the door to open; good design might highlight that we ought to pull (p.9).

Much of the literature on ICT and affordances takes this design theory approach. However, the need to acknowledge the complexity of the relationship between the platform (or software) and the user has led scholars to introduce modifications such as “hidden” or “false” affordances” (Gaver 1991), and “imagined affordances” (Nagy & Neff 2015). These terms attempt to consider how the existing socialisation of the user leads to unpredictable actions, and the potential for miscommunication between designer and user. De Souza et al introduce “missed” affordances (the feeling of “why can’t I...?” when attempting certain tasks) and also “declined” affordances (the feeling of “thanks, but no thanks” in relation to a specific offering), through which individual users develop an “idiolect” — a set of habits and shortcuts specific to their own understanding of the software (2000). The general appeal of affordances to communication scholars is that it seems to offer “a kind of middle ground between technological determinism and social construction” (Nagy & Neff 2015, p.2), offering a set of options within which users have the freedom to choose their course of action.

This is the appeal of affordances to danah boyd, whose influential study of Facebook in the lives of US teenagers identifies these four key affordances of social media:

Persistence: the durability of online expressions and content.

Visibility: the potential audience who can bear witness.

Spreadability: the ease with which content can be shared.

Searchability: the ability to find content. (boyd 2013, p.11)

As I will make clear, these definitions are closer to platform “features” than affordances, and as such they do not capture what is politically at stake within platform-user interactions. Indeed, the majority of these considerations of affordances in ICT and social media literature have significant limitations in terms of the insight that they offer into the relationship between platforms and users. These limitations are mainly consequences of the concept’s roots in ecological psychology and in design, and I highlight a few of these now.

Primarily, existing affordances literature is poorly equipped to consider the political economy of an environment which isn’t simply “found”, but which is shaped by powerful vested interests and the programmers they hire, where there is consequently agency on *both sides*, working to *separate and often mutually-incompatible ends*. There is an underlying assumption of universalism in Norman’s approach which feeds into ICT and social media literature — that “the user” is an abstract entity that wants “good” design with “appropriate” uses. This may be relatively harmless when considering how to indicate whether doors open with a “push” or a “pull”, but I think when considering software and platforms which have a wide array of potential uses — many of them directly contradictory — this design-centred approach elides the cultural and political importance of who determines the definitions of “good” and “appropriate” design. The term is a good way for designers to imagine themselves as politically-neutral helpers — indeed, this is in keeping with the “connection” rhetoric of Silicon Valley (van Dijck 2013) — but not particularly good at thinking about how this “help” might be ideologically loaded, or take on pernicious or even exploitative forms.

What these accounts tends to neglect is the extent to which the relationship between platforms and users is an antagonistic one, even if social media enables new opportunities for communication and self-expression. Whilst they might not be

“workers” (see Chapter 2.3), social media users occupy a common social position in relationship to platforms, who own the means of production and seek to maximise surplus value from this vantage point, and as such seek to suppress class-consciousness in favour of individualistic aspiration. Perceived affordances which lead to confused users are, for Norman, always a design error. There is minimal consideration of the ways in which capitalist technology firms might thrive on the generation of these “errors”. The “imagined affordances” identified by Nagy and Neff (2015) might be politicised then, by thinking about the role of myth and rhetoric in social media’s rapid trajectory towards omnipotence; this might involve considering its initial association with notions of radical freedom and democratisation, in juxtaposition with the quotidian experiences that platforms provide for most people today.

Attempts to re-draw the definitions of technological affordances often go back to Gibson’s work in order to look past design studies and to stick more closely to the “original” approach (McGrenere & Ho 2000; Dohn 2009; Hafermalz et al. 2015). However, whilst Gibson does consider human-made and “artificial” environments as well as natural ones, his ecological-psychological approach makes no differentiation between them — we “find” and attempt to “use” environmental features based on our “needs”, and there is no consideration of the way that these needs might be manufactured or misrecognised. This makes his work an inappropriate urtext for an interpretive approach to largely human-made environments (as noted by Bloomfield et al. 2010), and any attempts to return to this source as a basis for knowledge will be severely limited.

So why continue on with affordances? There is hardly a shortage of critical accounts of social media (covered in the next chapter), many effectively combining discourse analysis, ethnographic research and a critical political economy approach without using affordances. However, I want to hold on to affordances as the meeting-point between platform intention and user intention, and therefore the politically-charged point of tension between capitalist strategies of accumulation, and potentially resistant approaches.

There are some conceptualisations of affordances that demonstrate this potential.

Adrienne Shaw's re-working of affordances draws on Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model of communication, re-inserting political questions of intent and interpretation, and also allowing room for user agency without neglecting to address the disparity of power between the multinational, often monopolistic, corporations who design most of our online world, and the atomised individuals who navigate it (2017). This approach also helpfully points towards social media's position as *media text* — whilst we tend to think about the novelty of interaction and user-led engagement, it is important to remember how much of a platform is *broadcasted* to us in ways that are not dissimilar to the books, newspapers, TV shows and films that have previously been (mostly) considered as fairly uni-directional media. In a similar vein, Yuli Patrick Hsieh argues for an acknowledgment of "communication multiplexity" in his article on affordances and digital inequality, and suggests we consider the extent to which the "social affordances of ICTs are technologically bounded and socially constructed" (2012). Turner and Turner suggest a consideration of three "levels" of affordance: a basic level (covering usability and ergonomics), middle level (relating to "embodiment" and the ability to complete small tasks) and a top level (the "cultural affordance" which relates to the broader *purpose* of the activity) (2002). This is handy at a conceptual level, although I would argue that in real usage of platforms these three "levels" are tied together as one, manifested in the way that we find our efforts towards a specific end are stymied or enabled by platform design.

There are two key dimensions, then, to my application of affordances in this research. Firstly, drawing on the work above (Turner & Turner 2002; Hsieh 2012; Nagy & Neff 2015; Shaw 2017), and the analysis of social media "layers" considered in the following chapter's literature review (van Dijck 2013), I understand affordances to be a good place to consider the political and cultural impact of platforms. My approach seeks to problematize the purported neutrality of "good" design, and indeed argues that affordances are best understood as *a site of political tension*, where a set of capitalist imperatives meet (and often shape) the behaviours and aims of a myriad of users.

Secondly, I think we need to pay attention to the ways in which *specific* users engage with platforms in order to find specific political tensions and specific consequences, which might then be built up into general ones (Hafermalz et al. 2015 points towards this, although their use of term "niche" is I think unhelpful for what ought to be a

generally applicable model of analysis). Just as the ecological-psychological understanding of affordances depends on the biological and psychological capacities of specific actors — e.g. humans being able to conceive of, shape, and utilise hand-tools — my understanding of social media affordances depends on the specific political and cultural positions of users. Here, I apply Gibson’s work as a metaphorical scholarly device, rather than suggesting that an approach centred on ecological psychology might actually be practicable. Take, for example, boyd’s affordance of “searchability” on Facebook (2013, p.11). The fact that Facebook has a search bar is really the equivalent of the over-hanging rock; its existence does not tell us much about whether users search for things or not. Indeed, “searchability” is really just a re-phrasing of the technical feature of the site as it is imagined by designers. As soon as we put a real and specific user on the platform, what the search bar affords might be “learning”, “planning”, “reuniting”, “spying”, and so on — and in each of these we get a sense of the political and also the *psychological* dimensions at work. Gibson’s assertion that affordances “have to be measured *relative to the animal*” (1979, p.127), used again as metaphor, points to the fact that, at the social level, to fail to account for a given user’s specificities is to abstract the “user” away to nothing.

The affordances that I identify in this thesis, then, are specific to the user group, specific to the platforms they use and also to the *versions* of these platforms that are delivered to them — although these same affordances may *also* arise in other combinations of specific users and platforms. Some affordances will be more generalisable than others; some will say more about the user than the platform, and vice versa. Since the affordances explored here constitute an actor *doing something with* an environment (or vice versa), I introduce them with gerund form “-ing” labels, rather than boyd’s “-ability” nouns — this is following Gibson who says, for example, that steps built to help us navigate steep surfaces “afford stepping” (1979, p.132).

1.6 Chapter outlines

In this chapter I have outlined my research question, defined my research population, established my methodology, and outlined the importance of Nancy Fraser’s model of social justice to my understanding of cultural resistance. In the next chapter, I position

my work in relation to critical social media studies, by offering a literature review on key areas including digital labour, the impact of the social web on cultural work, and the effects of social media on subjectivity.

Chapter 3 engages with DIY music history, as well as with relevant literature from popular music studies. The aim here is to allow my analysis to compare and contrast historical DIY scenes with the present-day, and to demonstrate the relationship between DIY scenes and their specific political and cultural contexts. I develop a framework which presents DIY as a site of tension. I identify four key tensions, which provide an over-arching structure for the rest of the thesis. These tensions are between *production and consumption*, *insularity and openness*, *community and the individual*, and *resourcefulness and refusal*. Using this framework I consider three historical case studies of DIY scenes — UK post-punk, US post-hardcore indie, and UK and US riot grrrl. The following four chapters of fieldwork analysis are also divided according to these same four key tensions.

In Chapter 4, I consider the relationship between *production and consumption* in the contemporary DIY scene. I suggest that the forms of intimacy and emotional connection that have acted as guarantors of DIY's particular authenticity are increasingly an expectation of musicians' self-branding online, and that their capacity to offer cultural resistance might therefore be undermined. I argue that the "everyday" social media usage of DIY practitioners situates them as variously *both* consumers and producers on platforms, and as such threatens to undermine the "specialness" of production as a source of self-realisation. I also use Blauner's work on alienation to consider how platform experiences do not generally lead to self-estrangement, but nonetheless involve feelings of meaninglessness and powerlessness.

In Chapter 5, the tension between *insularity and openness* is explored. I argue that social media gives practitioners new ways to "imagine" audiences, and that these are means are primarily quantitative. In this way, practitioners are encouraged towards aspiration and growth in ways that are detrimental to cultural resistance, but this tendency is counter-acted by an ability to see "beyond" the numbers and find context-specific meaning. I also consider the emphasis on "safety" within the scene as a move towards insularity, and try to separate out the various and conflicting meanings that this

term has accrued — emphasising the importance of safety for the self-realization of marginalised groups, whilst noting that platforms also contribute to experiences of mundanity and predictability in negative ways. I also show, in a case study, how a new affordance of “rallying” dominates online interactions with other music scenes, creating short-term engagements with minimal discursive value.

In Chapter 6, relations between the *community and the individual* are considered. An emphasis on seeking “relatability” and “socially recognised self-realisation” (Arvidsson 2008, p.332) is shown to reduce practitioners’ tendencies to seek a more autonomous self-expression. I consider the potential for the DIY to exemplify “convivial competition”, and argue that features of the social media landscape, particularly recommendation algorithms, serve to disrupt this sense of conviviality. I demonstrate how platforms reproduce individualistic understandings of creative practice, and how the decline of local, scene-specific sites has diminished feelings of community.

In Chapter 7, on *resourceful and refusal*, I argue that DIY and other music scenes are increasingly making use of the same online platforms and digital tools, and label this shared practice as “platform DIY”. Whilst this brings new opportunities for self-organisation and creative autonomy, these strategies of resourcefulness are also in keeping with an individualised and neoliberal “enterprise discourse”, and therefore doing it “yourself” loses much of its radical alterity. I also demonstrate, using Harry Braverman’s work in labour process theory, that reliance on automated tools provided by monopolistic platforms constitutes a relative deskilling of cultural work. I introduce “optimisation” as an important platform logic, which I argue is a means by which *marketing-esque* strategies are presented to DIY practitioners as *other than* marketing by emphasising users’ choice and agency. I conclude this chapter by considering the ways in which DIY might fruitfully counter some of the challenges highlighted in this research, including utilising free and/or open-source software, building co-operative platforms and networks, and moving away from future-oriented brand-building in DIY practice.

Chapter 8 is a short concluding chapter in which I summarise my findings, and consider their contributions to and consequences for critical social media studies.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

As I identified in the previous chapter, my research is oriented in two “directions”, the first being social media, and the second being DIY music. I focus in this chapter on reviewing literature that relates to social media — its history, its specific characteristics, and its position within a wider digital economy. As a result, there are some areas of literature that are not covered in this chapter, but which I necessarily address elsewhere: the majority of my engagement with popular music studies, and with DIY music as a specific form of popular music, comes in the following chapter on DIY music histories. Literature on music “scenes” (and other variants), and on defining (cultural) resistance, is covered in Chapter 1, as part of my methodology. Literature on affordances as a means of analysing social media is also in Chapter 1 (although mentioned in passing here), since this constitutes a key methodological tool.

This chapter is divided into four main sections and a conclusion, dealing with areas of literature which inevitably overlap to some degree, and I have tried to signpost this overlap where pertinent. I focus on these areas because they are particularly relevant to my research question; cumulatively they offer a broad overview of the shifting economic terrain upon which resistance might be performed, as well as specific insight into the impact of social media on cultural and personal life. In the first section, I deal briefly with internet histories before focussing on the various attempts to determine what exactly is being “enclosed” or “captured” in the digital economy (including literature on peer-production, immaterial labour, and the commons), before highlighting “platform capitalism” as specifically helpful in understanding some key characteristics of its organisation. Secondly, I consider existing debates on digital labour, including literature on prosumption and the audience commodity, and identify my own position with regards to social media as “work” and as “exploitation”. In the third section I consider some specifics of creative and cultural activity, primarily considering consequences of the internet and the social web, but also addressing recent studies on work in the cultural industries. Fourthly, I consider the impact of social media on subjectivity and socialisation, identifying some of the key debates — self-branding and

empowerment, the role of algorithms and surveillance, metrics and the quantified self — and emphasising the importance of a “layered” approach which combines ethnographic research with political economy of communication, and technical analysis of platform architecture. I conclude this chapter by reiterating my own position in relation to some key debates.

2.2 Internet histories and digital economies

To study the internet is to aim at a moving target. In this section I consider where and when that target has moved — looking at historical accounts of the formation of the internet, at the emergence of the social web, and at the literature that has attempted to pin down the specific characteristics of the digital economy.

Historical accounts of the internet are pertinent to my research since they offer a means of understanding online platforms and protocols in relation to the philosophies of the individuals and organisations that have shaped it. One key contribution of this literature has been identifying the links between 1960s counterculture and the “cyberlibertarian” ideology that shaped the early internet and 1990s tech culture (Barbrook & Cameron 1996; Abbate 1999; Turner 2005; 2010). Whilst this might appear to diverge from histories that show the internet’s roots in US government-funded projects, and its connections to military and defence (Streeter 2011; McChesney 2013), the U.S. Advanced Research Projects Agency (responsible for the proto-internet ARPANET) was a highly decentralised, “freewheeling” and “open to high risk” department (Hafner & Lyon 1998, p.10), hiring scientists and academics who were free to explore computers’ potential to augment human intelligence (Licklider 1960; Engelbart 1962). The other fundamental aspect in the formation of present-day Silicon Valley, and which is comparatively under-addressed in the literature, is the extent to which venture capital firms were established and grew up *symbiotically* with the Californian IT industry during the 1960s, investing in the private companies that fulfilled US government contracts. Whilst these histories tend to be dominated by stories of individuals at the expense of institutional histories, it does nonetheless seem pertinent that many of these “cyberculture” pioneers ended up extremely rich. Another historical approach has shown that re-considering previous “new” media might illuminate and mitigate current

claims and concerns around the internet's radical communicative capacity (Standage 1998 on the telegraph as the "Victorian internet"; Wu 2010 on historical media monopolies).

The dawn of Web 2.0 has been seen as the most significant rupture in web history, as well as the point of its "massification" (Lovink 2008, p.3). Whilst there are attempts to tell a specific history of the "social web" (Boyd & Ellison 2008; Scholz 2007; 2008; Lovink 2011), it seems to me most fruitful to understand social media and the rise of platforms as constituting evolution rather than revolution. Indeed it was the "cyberlibertarians" at *Wired* magazine and their ilk that shaped the language and expectations of "Web 2.0" (Kelly 2005; O'Reilly 2005), and its history has been characterised by the same peculiar blend of social engineering, high-finance, and the transfer of public resources into private fortunes. As such, today's dominant platforms are corporations that present a peculiarly anti-corporate rhetoric — Google's notorious "don't be evil" motto is matched by Facebook's lesser-known anti-corporate equivalent, "don't be lame" (Kirkpatrick 2011, p.330). Studies of "start-up culture" demonstrate the continuation of a similar ideology, with an emphasis on "disruption" carrying the same convenient dual connotations of market-creating innovation and social change (Levina & Hasinoff 2017; Hogarth 2017). This of course is not to downplay the importance of understanding and analysing the specific features and discourses of social platforms (Boyd & Ellison 2008; Beer 2008b; José van Dijck 2013).

The Web 2.0 "moment" was also the period in which the most optimistic literature emerged concerning the internet's potential for "peer production" (Leadbeater & Miller 2004; Tapscott & Williams 2007). Much of this literature seems out-dated now, as does the accompanying "Web 2.0" terminology (Lovink 2011, p.1), but is still worth exploring, since it gives an indication of internet research's direction of travel, and also continues to offer some of the most thorough imaginations of the internet's democratic potential. Arvidsson, for example, sees the emergence of an "ethical economy" emerging as a consequence of the inherently social characteristics of knowledge work (2009). Bauwens argues that peer-to-peer (P2P) activity constitutes "a third mode of production, a third mode of governance, and a third mode of property", preferable to the gift economy since it is "entirely non-reciprocal" and wherein, in an echo of Marx,

“each contributes according to his capacities and willingness, and each takes according to his needs” (2005).

Axel Bruns’ notion of “produsage” (a blend of “producer” and “user”) identifies new forms of large scale, user-led collaborations, and his coinage has been widely adopted in similarly positive accounts. And Bruns doesn’t ignore the purchase of these sites by big media conglomerates (e.g. News Corp buying MySpace), but rather suggests that the corporate co-option of this production makes up only a small part of a larger “produsage” sphere (Bruns 2008b). More recent work by Bruns and Schmidt points beyond Wikipedia and FLOSS (Free/Libre Open Source Software) and towards less “well-researched” examples (2011); however, the paucity of examples of peer-production is rather damning for previous prophecies of its predominance. Peer-production seems most likely to continue as a small fraction of the online economy, and therefore face many of the same problems faced by co-operatives under capitalism in terms of maintaining viability (Jakobsson 2010; Scholz 2016).

Much of the more optimistic literature concerning peer-production draws upon theory derived from the work of autonomist Marxists, and particularly upon the notion of “immaterial labour”. Immaterial labour proponents argue that an increasing amount of activity (at least within the “higher order” of capitalism) is concerned less with the production of material goods, and more with the social production and circulation of knowledge and information (Negri 1991; Lazzarato 1996; Virno 2004; Hardt & Negri 2004); Dyer-Witthford was among the first to relate this literature to the internet (Witthford 1994; Dyer-Witthford 1999). However, the concept of immaterial labour also supports some of the most pessimistic visions of the “social factory”, wherein “life comes to evolve entirely within capital, [and] there is no longer any outside” (Arvidsson 2005, p.30).

I agree with critics who suggest immaterial labour involves a problematic distinction between the mental and the physical, and underplays the materiality of information (Camfield 2007; Hamilton & Heflin 2011). I would also echo critiques that suggest immaterial labour theory draws on rather uncritical journalistic and industry literature on the knowledge economy, and therefore would benefit from close interrogation using labour process theory (LPT) (Thompson 2005; Böhm & Land 2012). However, without

wanting to stray too far into the “work or leisure” territory covered in the following sections, LPT’s capacity to highlight “indeterminacy” in the labour process seems to me an unhelpfully industry-centric way to consider human behaviour in what are mainly *non-work* environments, reducing subjectivity to something that is only worth measuring to the extent that it gets “in the way” of capital — i.e. by “indeterminacy” on social media we really mean the very stuff of life.

Not all peer-production literature is dependent on this conceptualisation of immaterial labour. Papadimitropoulos (2017) argues that this autonomist Marxist perspective is just one of three predominant approaches to the “commons”, the others being a liberal approach, which sees commons as viably co-existing with the state and the market (e.g. Ostrom & Hess 2007; Ostrom 2015), and the “reformist” approach which “intend[s] to reform capitalism to the extent that the latter will be forced to adjust to the Commons in the long run”. One benefit of the liberal “digital commons” perspective is that it doesn’t require the questionable separation of material and immaterial labour (Hess 1996; Bernbom 2000). However, in considering the qualities that make these goods *potentially* shareable, there is a lack of emphasis on the political economic forces that might constrain these possibilities. Benkler’s influential *The Wealth of Networks* highlights reduced transaction costs and non-rivalrous goods as significant problems for capital’s ability to enclose digital content (2006) but, as we have seen, these problems have hardly proved insurmountable thus far, and may even offer new means of solving these issues (e.g. Morris 2012 shows how metadata assists in the creation of digital music commodities).

In literature which seeks to pinpoint the specifically novel features of the digital economy, the crucial question concerns what kind of value is being created, by whom, and where it goes. There has been a scurry to find the prefix that best demarcates this new “...capitalism”; suggestions include “informational” (Witheyford 1994; Castells 2000), “communicative” (Dean 2010; Hill 2015), “platform” (Langley & Leyshon 2016; Srnicek 2017a), “data” (Morozov 2015; Aitken 2017), “digital” (Wajcman 2015), “vectoral” (Wark 2004), “cognitive” (Boutang 2012), and “computational” (Berry 2015). Similarly, the “...economy” is variously considered as best preceded by “reputation” (Hearn 2010), “attention” (Davenport & Beck 2001; Boyd 2017), “hi-tech gift” (Barbrook 1998), “Like” (Gerlitz & Helmond 2013), “sharing” (Schor 2013; Schor

& Attwood-Charles 2017) or “ethical” (Arvidsson 2009; Arvidsson & Peitersen 2016). Each of these covers different, overlapping areas, but all ought to be considered as an attempt to pin down precisely what is distinctive about these forms of exchange — what activity is being “captured”, and what new methods of enclosure are being pursued. The political economy of communication approach helps to identify that amongst the new technologies, there are old motivations (money), and old media and telecommunications firms that have retained influence and power (McChesney 2013). Arvidsson and Colleoni’s attempt to demonstrate the direct link between user affect and platform value on the stock market misses a few important steps in the value-chain, but is useful in considering how our everyday experience of platforms might depend on their shadow form as financial entities compelled to satisfy investors in volatile and speculative markets (2012).

In my work I primarily use Srnicek’s conception of “platform capitalism”, which I think best captures a number of critical features of the current digital economy. Firstly, he identifies continuity between the current landscape and a longer economic history — the 1970s “crisis of profitability”, resulting conditions of neoliberalism (Harvey 2005), the 1990s dot-com boom and bust — and shows how capitalism results in industries being “incentivised to continually transform the labour process” (2017a, p.12). In this way, Srnicek highlights the continuities between post-Fordism and the platform economy; I understand platform capitalism to be co-existent with post-Fordism, rather than constituting a radical break. Secondly, Srnicek identifies the predominance of multi-sided markets (MSMs), with platforms acting as the mediator between users engaged in various kinds of exchange — hence the confusion between production and consumption explored below — allowing “low-margin goods” to combine into “high-margin services” (p.41). Thirdly, he suggests that user activity is a “raw material” which needs to be “cleaned” in order to constitute data (“information that something happened”), and then transformed into knowledge (“information about *why* something happened”) (p.39). Data needs “recording”, and is therefore a material medium, with substantial consequences — the internet accounts for 9.2% of the world’s electricity consumption (p.40).

The label of “platform capitalism” needs to be applied carefully and with attention paid to the wide range of economic models and activities it covers. Srnicek’s taxonomy is

useful in this regard, since it distinguishes between five major platform models — “advertising”, “cloud”, “industrial”, “product”, and “lean” (2017, pp.46–60). Van Dijck 2013's four categories of social media are also useful as a lower level of division, separating out social networking sites (SNS), hosts of user-generated content (UGC), play-and-game sites (PGS), and trading and marketing sites (TMS). Dean’s “communicative capitalism” (Dean 2010) points to the fact that this economy is largely driven by ordinary, social activity, and her work goes further towards issues of subjectivity that Srnicek’s political economy approach does not prioritise.

2.3 Digital labour: working hard, or hardly working?

I move on now to consider the literature concerned with the question of “digital labour” — that is, the ways in which our online activity might be categorised as work or leisure (or something else), as production or consumption (or something in-between), and relatedly, the means by which platforms generate surplus value from users. This literature tends to be less concerned with platforms where activity strongly resembles traditional forms of paid work (such as Uber and Deliveroo), and more concerned with recognising that the digital economy might include “forms of labor we do not immediately recognize as such: chat, real-life stories, mailing lists, amateur newsletters, and so on” (Terranova 2000, p.38). An updated version of this list might include the more social media specific activities of sharing, liking, and commenting. In short, this is “production of the kind cultural theorists have mainly theorized in relation to consumption” (Terranova 2000, p.42), and that are therefore mainly undertaken without financial reward. The debate over this distinction between work and leisure matters, since important questions about exploitation and alienation depend to a large extent on the answer to the question: “are they working?”.

Much of the debate over digital labour was stimulated by Terranova’s influential examination of “free labor” online (2000). Drawing on the autonomist Marxist notion of “immaterial labour” discussed above, Terranova argues that we produce, both online and off, informational and cultural content in ways that are *inherently* collective, yet which take place “within a field that is always and already capitalism” (p.38). The question of whether this activity constitutes “free labor” is not about whether this

productive activity is or is not taking place, but the extent to which it is “channeled” into “monetary flows and [...] capitalist business practices” (p.39). Terranova’s conclusion, therefore, is that “the Internet does not *automatically* turn every user into an active producer” (my emphasis), and that “the process whereby production and consumption are reconfigured within the category of free labor signals the unfolding of a different (rather than completely new) logic of value” (p.35). As such Terranova’s assessment contains a number of subtleties and ambiguities that are worth holding on to, namely: that “free” might not only mean “unpaid” but also “not imposed”; that the internet is vast and varied, and therefore “some” free labour does not mean “all” online activity is such; and that it is necessary to take into account continuity as well as change when considering purported “new” forms of capitalist enclosure. Many approaches to digital labour, whether optimistic or pessimistic, have tended to erase some of these ambiguities.

Digital labour has been considered as a form of “prosumption” — a blend-word of “production” and “consumption” first coined by Alvin Toffler (1980), and most thoroughly explored in a series of articles (co-)authored by George Ritzer (Ritzer & Jurgenson 2010a; Ritzer et al. 2012; Ritzer 2014; Ritzer 2015a; Ritzer 2015b). Since then the usage of the term has become widespread and unwieldy: scholars have located evidence of prosumption in the fitness industry (Millington 2016), community gardens (Shaw et al. 2016), digital “commemoration” (Recuber 2012), selfie-taking (Charitsis 2016), “freeskiing” (Woermann 2011), and in usage of platforms eBay and Freecycle (Denegri-Knott & Zwick 2012; Eden 2017). Davide Dusi valuably distinguishes between five separate categories of prosumption (2017), including “basic digital prosumption”, “customer self-service”, and “bricolage”, where consumers customise and design their own products (Campbell 2005 on “craft consumption”; Wolf & Mcquitty 2011 on the “DIY consumer”). Dusi’s last category of “collaborative” or “peer-to-peer” prosumption is substantially distinct from Ritzer’s initial usage of the term to consider changing relationships between companies and their customers. (Peer-production is considered in the section above, and literature on “participatory cultures” is in the section on cultural work that follows.)

What I take forward from this literature into my own work (without adopting the term prosumption), is that production and consumption have always been interlinked (i.e.

there is no *pure* production or consumption), and also that they are *increasingly* interlinked (Burston et al. 2010). However, I follow Zwick in thinking that Ritzer's "prosumer capitalism" goes both "*too far* to remain useful analytically", and also "*not far enough* in its understanding of how our collective productive and consumptive capacities are mobilized, captured, and valorized in contemporary capitalism" (2015, p.486). Zwick's latter point, about *where* valorization happens, is critical since the "making productive" of our non-work time tends to be a distinct activity from our actual experience of it (see below on the audience commodity), and therefore is unlike paid work in which our time is harnessed and submitted to the will of capital to a far greater extent.

One prominent perspective on digital labour has centred on updating the "audience commodity" model, a Marxist approach initially applied to consider television viewers' contribution to surplus value (Smythe 1977; 1978). This perspective considers the activity of viewing adverts as the primary "labour" of social media, which is undertaken by users and capitalised upon by platforms who charge advertisers for this labour (Lee 2011; Fuchs 2012; Manzerolle & McGuigan 2014; Fisher 2015; Dolber 2016). Drawing heavily on Smythe, Christian Fuchs literally "does the math" to arrive at a figure for the amount of free labour undertaken by users for Facebook in 2011, which he puts at a mammoth sixty-five billion hours (2012). The rate of exploitation is, for Fuchs, "infinite", because all user labour is unwaged and creates value for Facebook (2010, p.191; c.f. Hesmondhalgh 2010, Caraway 2011 and Kangal 2016 for thorough critiques of this conclusion).

Early criticisms of the "audience commodity" remain relevant in this new context. The internet, like television, is a mixed economy, but the "audience commodity" really only makes sense when the medium in question is advertiser-funded (Jhally 1982). And, importantly, the "audience" sold by TV companies (and now by platforms) is not the same entity as the actual audience watching the show, but is rather an abstraction generated by the media companies in question (Meehan 1984). In this way "the audience" as a commodity is the media's product, produced by their *paid* employees, just as the data generated by social media activity is really a distinct product created and owned by platforms, not the activity in and of itself (Caraway 2016) — even though it may rely on the mobilization of vast numbers of users as its raw material. Platforms

have real-time tracking capabilities that are much more advanced than TV rating systems (Andrejevic 2007; Napoli 2010), but the distinction remains pertinent, and platforms have a vested interest in making this audience seem more coercible and more thoroughly data-mined than it actually is. We need to be careful not to take this rhetoric of audience manipulability at its word (perhaps because it helps us in building the case for critical social media studies?), and to understate user agency as a result.

Smythe argues that it is necessary to understand communications as a material form of production (i.e. part of the “base”), rather than *merely* acting as an ideological tool (i.e. “superstructure”), and this seems particularly pertinent to a social media landscape in which platforms’ content often seems to be more user-determined than the “old” media (1977). The economic question of how value is generated is of critical importance. However, in turning the traditional understanding of media production “upside down” (Livant 1978) to position the audience as the product, the materialist approach of the audience commodity doesn’t answer the question of *why* people freely give their time in order to be sold to advertisers, and therefore tends to fall back on unsatisfying ideological arguments (essentially: people watch because they don’t know to do otherwise). For Fuchs, in the absence of mass media’s ideological hold, social media’s power is *compulsion* — a feeling that one is “required” to participate, often considered as a consequence of “network effect” or “network externality” (Fuchs 2012). In both cases, the capacity for resistance — or, more prosaically, *enjoyment* — seems minimal. The audience commodity approach is helpful in that it points towards a sufficient economic (and materialist) motivation for media systems, from the producers’ side. However, it is unhelpful insofar as this tends towards a totalising view of the media in which audiences are doubly-burdened — as both helpless, exploited economic actors, and also as passive “cultural dupes”.

For Hesmondhalgh, part of the problem with Fuchs’ approach, and with digital labour critiques of social media more generally, results from an unwieldy application of the concept of “exploitation” — both in a Marxist sense, and as a more general means of understanding what social media users experience (Hesmondhalgh 2015; see also Caraway 2016). Hesmondhalgh argues that the globalised IT industry that facilitates our online activity relies upon appalling working conditions involved in the production of consumer electronics (Chan 2013; Andrijasevic & Sacchetto 2014; Kinniburgh 2014;

Verité 2014), and therefore understanding of “degrees of suffering” might re-affirm these more serious forms of exploitation taking place further up the “value chain”, rather than the “irritating inconvenience[s]” of using (or avoiding) social media (Hesmondhalgh 2015). In a separate article (2010), he also critiques the “unpaid labour” approach to user-generated content by highlighting the “range of pleasures and rewards” that can be gained through unpaid social, cultural, and leisure activity (e.g. Markman 2011 on podcasters). The ethnographic studies of online activity discussed in section 2.4 go some way to filling out this claim, as well as offering some less positive counter-examples.

Hesmondhalgh provides an important reminder to relatively privileged scholars that we miss the bigger picture, and fail to address the greater suffering, if we focus our critical attention only on the trivial (but relatable) frustrations of social media that are experienced by those who are, geographically, culturally, and economically, our closest neighbours. I would also agree that we need to retain a realistic sense of what constitutes work and leisure, without which there is scant means by which to differentiate between the best and worst aspects of our lives. But, as I have noted, social media is so diverse in terms of the range of activities (and people) it houses that whilst it may be an “irritating inconvenience” for some, it is something rather more serious for others, and therefore we need to take into account how social media activity is conditioned by external social and economic factors (just as all labour is). Marx’s material on the “stagnant population” — those who are sufficiently impoverished as to undertake piecemeal “outwork” as and when called upon by capital — is relevant here (1976 [1867], p.796), and has strong resonances with today’s “gig economy” (Hutton 2016), and the prevalence of zero-hour contracts (Monaghan 2017). From my own experience speaking with young DIY music practitioners, and judging by the amount of Facebook posts that I saw looking for work — “any work” — it would be difficult to overstate the extent to which precarious work is the norm. In such an environment, social media becomes a critical place to be “visible” and available for work, and social media platforms capitalise on (and I think exploit) those times and places where “connectivity” (van Dijck 2013) becomes an economic necessity. We need to consider social media and exploitation, then, both in terms of general tendencies and specific situations, rather than something which is always or never exploitative (Petersen 2008), and to consider this alongside the other factors that define what constitutes “good” and

“bad” interactions with social media (i.e. its impact on subjectivity, discussed in section 2.5).

In the most pessimistic digital labour literature, the answer to the question “work or leisure?” is “both and therefore *worse*”— as if the subtler the labour, the more pernicious its effects (Fuchs & Sevignani 2013 on “playbor”; Scholz 2013 offers ruminations on “the internet as playground and factory”). In the most optimistic accounts, the answer is “both and therefore *better*” — seeing immaterial labour online as the dawn of a new economic era (Arvidsson 2009; Arvidsson & Peitersen 2016). The most engaging accounts recognise connections between digital labour and the problematic dimensions that have always existed “underneath” leisure, and which do not make it “work” (although I have argued that social media *sometimes* is), and which do not entirely override the capacity for leisure to be satisfying, to contribute to self-realisation and feelings of community.

2.4 Creativity, participation, and cultural work

Literature on making and sharing culture online overlaps with the literature on digital labour above, but also considers the new and modified means by which culture is circulated, the resultant opportunities and challenges for producers, the changing status of the audience, and consequences for the cultural economy specifically. What seems to be in relatively little doubt is that Web 2.0 and social media have elicited a greater degree of cultural “participation”. Here I separate and define three categories of literature, each of which focuses on a specific area of change: new opportunities for “participatory” *fan-esque* activity, new opportunities for more people to *become* cultural producers, and new opportunities for existing cultural producers to make money.

The first category is based on a positive view of cultural consumption, and draws on existing studies of cultural consumption that emphasise the active (and productive) role that audiences play in meaning-making, whether in terms of “decoding” and interpreting the text, or creating new texts out of popular culture (Morley 1986; Fiske 1987; 1989; Jenkins 1992). Social media “merge[s]” these kinds of meaning-making, since our semiotic decodings of culture become textual when we upload and share them

(Bolin 2012, p.806). In this model of participatory culture, the radical capacity of the internet to reorganise and *democratise* cultural production is not necessarily invoked, but the experiences of autonomy and pleasure gained by cultural audiences are *enhanced* by the social web's provision of new participatory opportunities (Jenkins 2006; Dena 2008). In this way it also relates to work in the field of fan studies, which similarly emphasises *active* and rewarding engagements with mass cultural products (Cavicchi 1998; Hills 2002; Brooker 2002). Literature on the intersection of pop music culture and the social web has explored how fans might get "closer" to (or even "co-create" with) artists, and the potential for exploitation to occur here (Beer 2008a; Baym 2012; Morris 2013; Haynes & Marshall 2017). Old critiques of "active audiences" literature remain pertinent in drawing attention to what might be lost through an overly positive approach to "participatory" consumption (Seaman 1994; Garnham 1995; see Andrejevic 2008 for an updated take). I follow Garnham in thinking that we need to be wary of both "economic reductionism" and also the "idealist autonomization" that characterises the active audiences perspective (1986), although I think his accompanying scepticism of "so-called identity politics" (1995, p.65) underplays and mischaracterizes the nature of these complex struggles for recognition (Fraser 2000; Fraser 2009).

The second category of literature emphasises the social web's provision of new means for people to *become* cultural producers — tending to characterise this shift as an opportunity for increased autonomy, and as a counter to the apparent hegemony of popular culture. This is distinct from the literature above which is broadly positive towards pop culture, instead arguing for the democratic potential in allowing the Web 2.0 user to "take over" the media. There are two separate benefits identified here. Firstly, that the "wisdom of crowds" (Surowiecki 2004) might bring about a higher quality of media and culture, as exemplified in literature on "citizen journalism" and its purported capacity to get the "real" story faster and more accurately than the old news media, potentially dismantling old media biases (Bruns 2003; Nerone 2009). The second benefit is more concerned with the capacity of creative production to offer superior opportunities for self-realisation, in contrast to existing norms of consumption. David Gauntlett draws on the philosophies of John Ruskin and William Morris to extol the virtues of "everyday creativity" (2011), and notes the social web's capacity to move us from a "sit-and-be-told" culture to one of "making-and-doing" (p.4). What seems to

be relatively under-explored here is consideration of what *kind* of experiences of creativity result from these new provisions, not just focussing on economic reward, but the way in which new technologies create empowerment and dependency at the level of artistic creation (e.g. Müller 2009 on YouTube's advice on making "quality" videos). Théberge's study of 1980s home studio technology remains relevant in this regard (1997). He found that home-recordists were reliant on software and hardware companies for their sonic material (i.e. samples, synth pre-sets), and that this new industry brought about new kinds of consumption, as well as opportunities for production. This optimistic vision of "You media" also runs into trouble when contrasted with figures that suggest the actual "content creation" of the social web is still performed by a small proportion of producers, with most internet users content to "lurk" as non-contributing consumers (Crawford 2009 highlights the importance of "listening" as the necessary counter to "speaking up" online). Merrin also provides a valuable ecological perspective, suggesting that environmental issues with cultural production are not solved (and may even be exacerbated) by Web 2.0's participatory ethos (Merrin 2012; Devine 2015; Hesmondhalgh & Meier 2017).

The third category of literature is concerned with the way in which existing cultural producers might capitalise on the increased "closeness" of cultural producers and fans identified in the first category, by highlighting ways in which the internet purportedly allows the latter to directly support their favourite artists. In this literature, the removal of industry "middle-men" allows direct access to audiences, capitalising on the ease of distribution permitted by the "long tail" of virtual sales platforms (Anderson 2006; critiqued in Hesmondhalgh & Meier 2015). Amanda Palmer's "Art of Asking" TED Talk is a celebrated example of this, pushing crowd-sourcing as a viable income stream, and underplaying her existing alt-rock celebrity status (Palmer 2013, see also Radiohead's headline-grabbing "pay what you want" approach); Kevin Kelly's related model of "one thousand true fans" suggested that a "realistic" focus on die-hard loyalty over global super-stardom can apparently net an income of \$100,000 p.a. (2008). However, early internet success stories such as the Arctic Monkeys and Sandi Thom are not only vastly outnumbered by unsuccessful non-stories but also tend to reveal, on closer inspection, the presence of "old" music industry support that is glossed over in favour of perpetuating the myth of cultural meritocracy (Dubber 2007; McLean et al. 2010). We need to be aware that the dissolution or redrawing of artist-audience

boundaries might also bring new difficulties and unwanted work for producers (Baym 2012 on negotiating artist-audience boundaries; Tessler & Flynn 2016 on pressures of “direct-to-fan” marketing; Ottovordemgentschenfelde 2017 on self-branding and subjectivity in online journalism).

In this environment, professional cultural workers attempting to defend existing industry standards of content quality and integrity (Lewis 2012), working conditions, and payment rates (Lowery 2013) are often presented as obstacles that inhibit the flow of information that “wants to be free” (Levy 1984). We need therefore to be alert to the ways in which the “opening up” of cultural production might create a “race to the bottom” where supply outstrips demand (Kennedy 2013), and consider how emphasis on “free” culture and a “sharing” economy might mask any resulting economic inequality (John 2013; Scholz 2016).

It is also necessary to be alert to the continuing success of “old media” strategies in the digital cultural economy: noting the enforced continuation of artificial scarcity through the “walled gardens” of Netflix, Spotify, and their ilk, and the disparately high amount of attention (and money) still paid to a handful of pop culture celebrities. Sender's model of new media as divided between “centre”, “margin” and “periphery” helpfully outlines the lack of exposure received by most user-generated content (2012, p.209). Barlow's early cyber-libertarian pronouncement that information would flow online like “wine without bottles” (1994) seems to have underestimated the power of media conglomerates to lobby for strict digital copyright law, and the power of governments to then lean on platforms in order to impose them (Vaidhyanathan 2004; Gurman 2009; McChesney 2013; Prior 2015). This battle to impose and extend copyright is very much on-going, but it is clear that the vigilance towards specific rights, and the neglect of others, works for the most part in the interest of corporations rather than users (Jakobsson & Stiernstedt 2010). The internet may have made some information “free”, but it is generally still “valued, and treated accordingly with price tags, intellectual property rights [...], patents, security, secrecy, hoarding, manipulation, or sabotage” (Fortier 2001, p.29). Facing new challenges online, and declining revenues offline, media firms (and music companies specifically) have sought to increase their stake in other areas such as branding and publishing (Stahl & Meier 2012; Meier 2017).

In considering continuity and change it is necessary to keep in mind the ways in which cultural products have been historically differentiated as a specific kind of commodity (Miege & Garnham 1979; Miège 1989; Garnham 1990), and as a kind of production with specific methods and business models (Ryan 1992; Toynbee 2000; Hesmondhalgh 2013a). The recent increase in attention paid to working conditions within the cultural industries has highlighted the inequality of rewards on offer, perpetuated through unpaid internships and informal “training” (Hesmondhalgh & Baker 2011), through presenting underpayment as a fair trade-off for cultural work’s “mental gratification” (Ross 2000), and through a discourse of neoliberal individual freedom (Banks 2007; Kennedy 2012; Gill 2014). Hesmondhalgh and Baker (Hesmondhalgh & Baker 2011), building on work by Blauner (1964), develop a helpful model of good and bad work for their study of cultural work in three industries. I utilise aspects of this model in my analysis, alongside Nancy Fraser’s framework of “maldistribution” and “misrecognition” (outlined in chapter 1), whilst acknowledging that the activity under consideration might not always be best considered as “work” (see section 2.3 above), and making adjustments accordingly.

Of particular relevance to my research, since it overlaps with the “self-sufficiency” that is often (but not always) prized within DIY music, is literature that identifies an “enterprise discourse” as prominent within cultural work (McRobbie 2000; Banks 2007; Kennedy 2010; Tessler & Flynn 2016; see also Chell 2008 on the entrepreneur as a “social construction” beyond the cultural sphere). Banks uses a neo-Foucauldian approach (drawing on the “self-governance” emphasised in Rose 1999) to consider power acting not through disciplinary means, but through the creation of subjects who are “trained to accept and reproduce *for themselves* the precise conditions of their subordination” (2007, p.42). Here, the neoliberal emphasis on individualism leads to “self-blaming” and ignores structural inequalities, whilst the “entrepreneurial war stories” told by successful creatives serve to validate and explain away failure as a necessary step towards success (which, of course, arrives for very few people) (Banks 2007, p.49). Whilst this literature is not always directly concerned with the digital cultural economy, some studies do make specific connections to the way that the social web allows supply to outstrip demand, thereby lowering prices (Kennedy 2013), and to the way that individuals are encouraged to work for free (Kuehn & Corrigan 2013 on

“hope labor”; Duffy 2015 on “aspirational labour”; Shepherd 2013 on making user-generated content as an “apprenticeship”).

2.5 Social media and subjectivity

In the section on digital labour, I stated that just because our social media activity constitutes the raw material which is transformed into data, it doesn't necessarily follow that we are also transformed. However, it also seems evident that social media has, for many of us, changed the way we understand ourselves, and the way that we relate to others. In this section I identify and summarise some of the key debates in this area.

One key finding is that social media platforms are highly conducive to “self-branding” (Hearn 2008; 2017a; Senft 2012), and to the related notion of “microcelebrity” (Marwick & boyd 2010; Fisher 2015). Whilst the early days of the internet were dominated by discussion of anonymity and “trying on” new identities, it has become increasingly necessary to present one coherent identity, which reflects the offline self, across multiple social media platforms and in real life (Kennedy 2006; José van Dijck 2013; c.f. Bernstein et al. 2011; Zimmerman & Ybarra 2016 for ongoing consequences of online anonymity). Social media is dominated by concerns over self-presentation and how one is seen in the eyes of an “imagined audience” (Marwick & boyd 2010; Brake 2012; Litt & Hargittai 2016; Uski & Lampinen 2016). These concerns relate to the understanding of social media as an “attention economy”, and one that tends to emphasise individual rather than group identity (Curran 2012, pp.56–9). However, I think that in some cases, such as Hearn's assertion that online reputations are “derived solely from the performance of effective attention-getting itself” (2010, p.437), to focus too heavily on attention is to miss the specificity of the cultural and symbolic content being generated (Abidin 2016), and the range of rewards (beyond attention) that are on offer.

Attention has also been paid to the increasing use of metrics as a means of understanding the self (Baym 2013; Beer 2016). Benjamin Grosser's consideration of “what metrics want” suggests that we find personal worth manifested in a “desire for more” (2014); Gerlitz argues that acting on data creates a “future orientation” among

users (2012); Powers has connected metrification to an increasing emphasis on speed and “firstness” online (2017). This also connects to literature on the “quantified self”, and the integration of measuring-technology into our understandings of our own bodies (Whitson 2013; Moore & Robinson 2016; Ruckenstein & Pantzar 2017). Some of this work has a tendency to overstate the impact of quantification on subjectivity by neglecting to attend to ways in which users might find alternative meanings in the data presented to them —Jakobsson’s study on YouTube users’ response to metrics offers a helpful counter-example (2010; also Kennedy & Hill 2017 on the “feeling of numbers”). Alison Hearn posits the “anticipatory, speculative self” as the “ideal type” of selfhood for the predictive, future-oriented perspective that metrics encourage (2017b, p.72).

Another concern has been with the way that social media’s recommendation algorithms might create a “filter bubble” (Pariser 2011), isolating us from cultural and political heterogeneity in favour of an “echo chamber” full of opinions and content that concurs with our own current position (Quattrociocchi et al. 2016; and see Morris 2012 and Hallinan & Striphas 2014 for potential implications on music and film culture). Related to this is the literature on the specific kinds of sociality and friendship created online — i.e. whether platforms support “bridging” or “bonding” relationships (Haythornthwaite 2002; 2005; Smith & Giraud-Carrier 2010), and work on the specific kinds of “publics” that might be fostered on social media (e.g. Fisher 2013). This also relates to concerns over the ways in which platform architecture and algorithms might replicate and even reinforce societal biases and discrimination, in terms of race (Edelman & Luca 2014; Striphas 2015; Schor & Attwood-Charles 2017) and gender (Datta et al. 2015; Bolukbasi et al. 2016). Another concern within literature on algorithms is that they might exacerbate a “stream logic” (Kaun & Stiernstedt 2014) which compels users to continue posting and sharing in order to remain “on top” (Bucher 2012). Part of the difficulty in exploring the role of algorithms is that they tend to be proprietary and private, which makes it hard to draw direct connections between what they do and how we feel, although this mystification of course shapes subjectivity in its own way (Bolin & Andersson Schwarz 2015; Nagy & Neff 2015 on “imagined affordances”). Literature stressing the all-pervading prominence of the “filter bubble” might be tempered by studies showing that social media is still a place where individuals and groups receive

unsolicited abuse from (often anonymous) strangers (Phillips 2015; Campbell 2017; Press Association 2017).

Ethnographic studies in this field have attempted to connect platform architecture with the specific usage patterns of social groups, and can offer important global perspectives (Awan & Gauntlett 2012; Rennie et al. 2016) — Miller et al's *Why We Post* series demonstrates how social media practices differ across nine different countries (Miller et al. 2015; Miller & Sinanan 2017). Ethnographic studies can also focus on specific user groups, giving insight into the specificity or universality of aspects of social media experience (e.g. studies on children and teenagers online: boyd 2013; Abidin 2017; Davidson & Ribak 2017). At their best, ethnographies can act as the “proving ground” for some of the more critical hypotheses considered above, although I think boyd and Miller both understate social media's structuring influence in attempting to show how their subjects — US teenagers (boyd 2013) and rural middle-Englanders (Miller 2016) — fold technology into their everyday lives. The title of Miller et al's collection, *How The World Changed Social Media* (2015), emphasises this focus on the human user rather than the technology itself as the driver of change. Older ethnographies of online cultures are also valuable, despite the speed at which technology and online culture has moved, since they offer a sense where continuity and change might be found in current online practice (Rheingold 1993; Turkle 1995; Baym 2000). A related approach to subjectivity is found in literature that documents and categorises resistance to social media — considered as something quite separate to those who try and enact political resistance *through* social media. These studies offer evidence that using technology to control and shape behaviour will almost always be met with unpredictable forms of user activity (Casemajor et al. 2015; Hargittai 2008; Woodstock 2014).

The most convincing accounts of social media's capacity to alter subjectivity have connected the strands discussed so far in this chapter: combining political economy of communication research, historical approaches, philosophical approaches to digital labour, detailed technological interrogation, and ethnographic study. David Beer has outlined this research agenda in relation to the “participatory web”, arguing that critical social media studies needs to engage with and move between three levels of analysis: firstly with the economics of the sites in question (how they create money and for whom), secondly with their functionality and architecture, and thirdly with “how the

concerns of the previous two levels play out in the lives of those that use (or do not use)” them. We need, he argues, an understanding of users’ motivations and strategies, focusing on “how they react to and resist the impulses written into the codes” (2009, p.998).

Jose Van Dijck’s study of a “culture of connectivity” is thus-far perhaps the most thorough integration of these levels of research, analysing five social media platforms across six “layers” that cover these platforms’ ownership, technology, users and usage, content and cultural form, and governance (2013). Van Dijck combines actor-network theory and a political economy of communications approach to offer both a “sociotechnical” and “socioeconomic” understanding of platforms, and also uses De Certeau (1984) to consider the “tactics” with which users negotiate these sites. Nancy Baym also takes a “grounded” yet critical approach (2015), Robert W. Gehl’s attempt to “reverse engineer” social media similarly connects between cultural, economic, and technological strata (2014), and the multi-authored *Twitter and Society* combines contributions to build a similarly holistic account (Weller et al. 2013). This multi-layered approach (or, in more detailed work, a thorough acknowledgement and understanding of these layers) is critical in understanding why social media is the way it is, and the specific consequences it brings. I think the concept of “affordances”, despite having some contradictory and problematic applications in the literature thus far (Nagy & Neff 2015 provide a good summary), is a good way to consider platforms as the “meeting point” between users’ and platforms’ oft-conflicting aims — a full explanation of how I use this concept is given in Chapter 1.5.

2.6 Conclusion

Fuchs and Dyer-Witthoford have argued for the need to understand the internet in terms of dialectics — existing modes of production “anticipate” their critique, and therefore we can “see” the ways in which current tools might, in different hands (i.e. the working class) allow for the radical reorganisation of society (2013, pp.786–787). This seems to me to be critical in navigating literature on social media, and understanding the ways in which the promises of the internet ring both true and false — seeming both infinitely distant and immediately feasible. So, in the “commons” literature for example, we see

the capacity for a post-scarcity society built on sharing resources, but we can also see that this capacity has been thoroughly capitalised upon by platforms in ways that are newly exploitative.

DIY music is a particularly pertinent area of study in this regard since it has, at its best, offered a critical interrogation of the dialectics of work and leisure, and of production and consumption, as well as providing a space for practice that attempts to challenge these binary distinctions. Where this thesis is well-positioned to contribute to digital labour debates and social media studies, then, is that it examines a sphere of activity that has historically stood at the intersections that currently constitute the “battleground” of digital labour, and considers the ways in which social media might affect these practices. Since DIY is a cultural form that has emphasised the *political* and *resistant* dimensions of self-determination and non-professional culture — both of which are now massively enabled by social media platforms, as well as massively profitable for them — an assessment of DIY’s current status offers a unique and valuable contribution to literature on social media’s capacity to evince empowerment and/or dependency, and the extent to which “socioeconomic” and “sociotechnical” components of platforms are shaping users’ activity.

In order to assess change and continuity in this regard, it is necessary to examine how DIY music has previously expressed cultural resistance, and its previous relationships with technology, and with the cultural industries. In the next chapter, therefore, I develop a framework for understanding DIY music as a site of tension, and present three case studies of historical DIY music scenes.

Chapter 3: DIY Histories

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I offer a history of DIY music in the form of three case studies of notable historical scenes. My primary aim is to demonstrate that DIY music is a particularly relevant field in which to consider the cultural and political impact of social media. I show that DIY music has historically been concerned with increasing autonomy, encouraging participation, and the democratisation of culture, all of which are

purportedly offered by social media platforms (and which are contested in the critical social media studies literature covered in the previous chapter). An analysis of a contemporary DIY music scene therefore offers an opportunity to interrogate social media's capacity to facilitate these kinds of practices. In outlining a history of DIY music in the form of case studies, I also aim to demonstrate the extent to which DIY practice has changed, across different scenes, in relation to technological and cultural norms, in a manner which allows me to then assess, in the following chapters, the extent to which social media has altered DIY music practice.

This chapter acts as an extension of the literature review, covering relevant areas of cultural studies and popular music studies (section 3.2), and locates this research in the context of existing literature on DIY music. It also develops an original framework for analysis (3.3) which I argue offers a rich insight into the capacity for different DIY scenes to offer cultural resistance (as defined in Chapter 1.6). The development of this framework constitutes the original research element of this chapter, and has three main dimensions:

Firstly, I argue that DIY is closely linked to pop and rock music culture, and therefore draws upon many elements of this culture, even as it attempts to create an alternative to it. It relies upon concepts taken from pop and rock, particularly the construction of authenticity, and remains enthralled by music industries phenomena (the record, the live show, fan culture) even as it attempts to bypass and reconfigure them (e.g. through critiques of commodification). Therefore, whilst DIY music is often construed as a “grassroots” cultural form, I argue that much of its “origins” in terms of practice come from *within* mainstream popular culture — to a greater extent than has been acknowledged in existing literature on DIY.

Secondly, I argue that this positioning results in tensions which are not only irresolvable but are fundamental to and indeed *constitutive of* DIY music. This insight forms the basis of my analytical framework. I identify four key tensions within DIY which then form the basis for my analysis of three historical case studies in this chapter: on UK post-punk (3.4), US post-hardcore indie (3.5), and riot grrrl (3.6). I utilise primary and secondary sources along with academic literature in order to reconstruct these three historical DIY music scenes for analysis through this framework of “tensions”.

Thirdly, I argue that this “case studies” approach usefully demonstrates that there is no single, ahistorical version of DIY music practice, but rather a number of sets of practices which reflect the extent to which different scenes have encountered and responded to diverse political, cultural, and technological norms. I demonstrate that my analytical framework offers a way of seeing DIY practitioners’ *agency* as a reflection of their engagement with *structural* challenges.

Having demonstrated that DIY scenes’ capacity to offer resistance and empowerment can be fruitfully interrogated through this framework, I conclude this chapter by preparing the ground for analysis of my own fieldwork. In a short final section (3.7), I summarise the main differences between my three case studies, reiterating that their differing response to the tensions within DIY constitute a reflection of structural forces at work.

3.2 DIY and the music industries

Understanding DIY music and its history requires an acknowledgement of the forms of culture to which it aims to be an alternative or antagonist. Therefore, in this section I present an overview of some important concepts for my research, drawing on literature from cultural studies and popular music studies in order to provide working definitions of *popular culture*, *popular music*, and *the music industries*. I then identify the importance of *authenticity* as a conceptual tool in popular music studies, with important links to the political status of music scenes.

Popular culture and its critics

Critical responses have emerged in parallel to the growth of industrialised popular culture, reflecting new anxieties about the human condition, and contesting and challenging the position of popular culture in society. Romanticism was an early critical response to industrialisation, and several of its key concerns have remained central to later approaches. Firstly, a concern for the quality of life offered by industrialised, urban environments, and in particular highlighting a “shallowness” of human experience

characterised by the dissipation of “organic” community and the atomisation of the individual. Relatedly, the artist is seen as necessarily “outside” this experience — in Romanticism particularly through an affiliation with the natural world — in order to “[occupy] a position as “bearers of the creative imagination” (Williams 1960 [1958], p.46). Concerns over the mechanisation of art, which would later be taken up by William Ruskin and William Morris, and the early-19th century Arts and Crafts movement, were therefore held partly out of concern for their own livelihoods, partly on aesthetic grounds (mass-produced as “poor quality”), but also due to a distrust of rationality and economism, and fear that these forces of “progress” might impact on art’s capacity to reflect a deeper truth. Williams highlights Keats’ theory of “negative capability”, which argues for the valorisation of mental states of “uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason.” In this way the Romantics claimed “to present a wider and more substantial account of human motive and energy than was contained in the philosophy of industrialism” (Williams 1960, p.49).

The modernists of the early twentieth century were similarly averse to popular or “mass” culture, and similarly decried its role in the unstitching of social fabric, but few modernists saw any value in looking backwards to recapture a lost organic human experience. Instead they recognised the ambiguous capacity of new technology to both emancipate and disenfranchise, and saw the need for art to reflect and engage with these new possibilities. Allison Pease characterises the response of British modernists specifically as highly fearful of popular culture’s impact, and particularly “the passive consumptive practices inculcated by mass-produced works, which, they claimed, stunted the full humanity of its recipients” (2011, p.202). In encouraging “aesthetic interactivity”, rather than allowing the consumer to be a passive receiver of “hypnotic” media (Pease 2011, p.204), the modernist text’s difficulty of comprehension became imbued with political significance.

These modernist conceptions of popular culture as stultifying and harmful were developed further by members of the Frankfurt School, and most notoriously by Theodor Adorno. For Adorno, popular culture suffered from not only the industrialisation but also the instrumentalisation of culture: primarily in the pursuit of profit but, in a precursor to Bourdieu’s work on “distinction” and cultural capital

(1984), Adorno also identifies cultural knowledge as prized only for its tangible rewards (as “a sure promise of time-saving promotion into the higher class”: 1991 [1942], p.62). The culture industry for Horkheimer and Adorno operated as a form of totalitarian control, offering the illusion of choice whilst in actuality providing “the freedom to choose what is always the same” (2002 [1944], p.162), and quashing the emancipatory potential of culture through the standardisation of its texts. Some leftist modernists were more hopeful of industrialised popular culture’s potential to engage and politicise working-class audiences — Walter Benjamin saw the new reproducibility of art as diminishing its “aura” and therefore potentially reducing its dependence on hierarchical social “ritual” (1973 [1936]); Bertolt Brecht utilised radical theatre techniques in his *Lehrstücke* (“lesson-plays”) in an attempt to compel mass audiences to engage critically with culture, rather than to passively consume. For Jameson, updating and adapting Adorno’s argument at the dawn of postmodernity, “political art” in popular culture is not possible because “authentic” society has been dissolved — popular culture is experienced as a “semiotic bombardment from which the textual referent has disappeared” (1979, p.138). Therefore, he “reluctantly concludes” that “the Brecht-Benjamin position, which hoped for the transformation of the nascent mass-cultural techniques and channels of communication [...] into an openly political art” fails to address “the specific conditions of our own time” (*ibid.*, p.140).

Judgement on the merit of popular culture often hinges on different readings of the political capacity of production and consumption, and particular on the capacity for agency involved in consumption. Following Adorno, a number of critical theorists and cultural studies scholars developed critiques of consumer culture based upon its creation of “false needs” (Marcuse 1991 [1964]), the nefarious impact of marketing (Packard 1957), and linking patriarchal control of the mass media to ongoing gender inequality (Friedan 1963). However, much of the work emerging from the Birmingham School in the 1960s and 1970s reconsidered the link between consumption and identity, such as Hall’s “encoding/decoding” model of communication, which argued that audiences play a key role in determining the meaning of cultural texts. Hebdige’s notion of “subculture” in particular identifies how working-class style can constitute “resistance” to popular culture’s more deleterious effects (1979). Jameson, in a generally pessimistic account, does in fact highlight “British working-class rock” as one of the few “pockets” of culture in which one can still find signs of “authentic life” (1979, p.140).

Drawing on these works, cultural studies undertook a re-assessment of the value of consumption in the 1980s and 1990s (Fiske 1989; Miller 1987; Jenkins 1992; critiqued as “cultural populism” in McGuigan 1992). Fiske argues, contrary to Adorno, that whilst “our culture is a commodity culture”, this does not mean that “what is profitable for some cannot be cultural for others” (1989, p.4). Fiske develops ideas adapted from De Certeau (1984) in order to argue that, through consuming popular culture, individuals have significant power to shape its meaning, utilising this capacity in order to enact “resistance” and “evasion” at the “micropolitical level”. Whilst Fiske is right to identify the capacity for audiences to create and shape meaning, this seems to me to be an insufficiently critical account of popular culture that fails to acknowledge its role in perpetuating severe economic inequality and impending environmental catastrophe, both directly, in its zealous pursuit of profits, and indirectly, through its ability to act as “distraction”. Fiske’s highly positive account of popular culture is dependent on seeing a high degree of agency within cultural consumption, emphasising “the power of consumer discrimination” (1989, p.14) in order to argue that “the people are unlikely to choose any commodity that serves only the economic and ideological interests of the dominant” (ibid., p.5). This fails to acknowledge the extent to which this choice is restricted by structural forces, and the ways in which the culture offered to us is determined by inequality of access to the means of production and circulation. Baudrillard argues, I think correctly, that whilst consumers might “resist particular precise injunctions”, and “advertising is not all-powerful and sometimes induces opposite reactions”, consumer culture is nonetheless characterised by the production of a “system of needs”, and individual experiences which might not feel alienating nonetheless support a disempowering and individualistic “consumption system” (1998 [1970], p.73). It is important, however, to recognise culture’s specific relationship to consumerism, and the ways in which culture’s “marginal” position in capitalism enable it to resist industrialisation and commodification as well as the ways in which this “ideology of creative freedom can be used to keep its labour force divided and weak” (Garnham 1990).

Understandings of popular culture, and particularly its links with consumerism, have been further complicated in recent years by various factors: by theories of postmodernity, which for Huyssen (1986) signal the end of the “great divide” between

popular culture and high art; by the emergence of the cultural “omnivore” and an increasing complexity of the relationship between cultural consumption and social identity (Peterson & Kern 1996); and by the potential for “prosumption” offered by the internet and social media (addressed in the previous chapter). Following Baudrillard however, I would argue that if we view individual consumption patterns at the wider social level, we find that popular culture is still (amongst other things) operational as a system of consumer preferences propagated by the media and advertising industries. Even with the aforementioned developments, contemporary popular culture is still dominated by best-sellers and blockbusters reinforced by a celebrity “star system”, and remains entangled with processes of instrumentalisation and commodification which serve to maintain hierarchies of power.

DIY’s understanding of popular culture informs its approach to number of key considerations: the role of the artist in society, the relative merits of production and consumption, the political role of technology in culture, and perspectives on populism and elitism. It is also crucial to understand how historical critics of popular culture might influence the forms that DIY culture take on today, and that the myth of counter-cultural figures (the romantic, the bohemian) linger long after the power of that image has been co-opted.

Popular music and the music industries

In developing a conception of popular music the distinction must be made between a pre-industrial local “popular”, and the globalised, commodified music to which the term refers today (although some scholars have questioned the extent to which this former “popular” or “folk” culture ever really existed, e.g. Harker 1985). Middleton and Manuel emphasise that popular music as an industry emerges not with the working-class but with the bourgeoisie, through the sale of sheet music to a growing number of domestic pianists (and later, player pianos), the resultant rise of music publishing companies, and the new techniques of “plugging” developed in order to gain advantages in this emerging market (Middleton & Manuel n.d.). This demonstrates the fundamental link between the music industries and copyright, which has offered legal protection for the economic exploitation of intellectual property, adapting to fears over bootlegging, and to the piracy threat of the digital era with the Digital Millennium Copyright Act

(DMCA) of 1998 (Prior 2015). It also demonstrates the long-standing link between music commodities and the technological “hardware” that utilises them — from player pianos to record, cassette, and CD players, and in the present-day to smartphones, tablets and other devices.

These close links between popular music, technology, and copyright demonstrate the extent to which popular music has been, from its emergence, entangled with the music industries. As Shuker notes, there are very few musicological descriptions that can adequately describe popular music across its many genres (2008, p.7), and therefore a socio-economic understanding of popular music is required. In particular, it calls for a focus on the commodity form of music as being the fundamental unit in which popular music circulates, and the centrality of profit-making to the organisations that make popular music, if not to the artists themselves.

Defining the music industries, as well, is complicated by the difficulty in separating out amateur and professional music-making (Finnegan 1988, p.13) and also, at the other end of the scale, by the long history of integration between music companies, consumer electronics, and more recently information technology corporations (Hesmondhalgh & Meier 2017). The music industries are constituted not just by record labels but also include “music publishing; music retail; the music press; music hardware, including musical instruments; sound recording and reproduction technology; tours and concerts; and associated merchandising [...]; and royalties and rights and their collection/licensing activities” (Shuker 2008, p.14). Horizontal and vertical integration within and across these areas is common, as music companies seek expansion and consolidation in order to stay profitable in a tumultuous and unpredictable sector. Meier sees that digitisation means that record labels are increasingly dependent on ancillary markets, with the rise in “360” deals and the importance of TV and advertising “syncs” reflecting their search for new revenue streams to offset a steep decline in physical and digital record sales (2017).

As with popular culture generally, one of the fundamental debates concerning popular music relates to whether popular music is formed from the “top-down” or the “bottom-up” — i.e. the extent to which it can be considered the authentic expression of “the people”, or a corporate product imposed upon an unsuspecting (or sometimes,

unwilling) audience. For those who take issue with the music industries' high degree of cultural power, one of the key concerns is the impact these industries have on artistry — both in terms of treatment of musicians, and the aesthetic quality of the resultant output. DIY music tends to base its critique of popular music on the premise that the aesthetic and economic situation of the popular music industries have negative effects upon the musician, the audience, and society. But it also acknowledges the powerful role that popular music might play in changing and shaping society for the better, and much of its practice is intended to utilise this potential towards their own political and cultural ends. DIY practice is often concerned with distancing itself from the music industry, but also often relies on copying and re-creating, in microcosm, music industry structures (albeit with significant differences). For that reason, an exploration of the concept of authenticity is valuable in attempting to understand how aesthetic and economic critiques interact in music and music culture, and how DIY music negotiates its position in relation to popular culture and the music industries.

Authenticity

Authenticity is a fundamental concept within both popular music and the literature of popular musicology, and yet for Simon Frith it is also “the most misleading term in cultural theory”. Misleading, he argues, because our focus should not be on measuring music's proximity to “truth”, but rather on understanding “how it sets up the idea of ‘truth’ in the first place” (2007 [1987], p.261). This idea of truth has been ascribed to virtually all aspects of popular music culture: to location, as in hip hop's supposed connection to “the streets” of inner-city U.S. (Krimm 2000); to technology, as in folk's scepticism towards non-traditional instruments (Richardson 2009); to performance style, as in rock's distrust of “theatrics” and “pretence” and its valorisation of earnest physicality (Moore 2002); to affect, as in dance music's relationship to bodily pleasure (Thornton 1995), or punk's emphasis on the authenticity of anger (Nehring 1997); and to issues of racial and gender identity, as in the “hipness” seen as embodied by black musicians in jazz (Grazian 2004), or the “homely” performance of female country singers (Fox 1998). Allan Moore distinguishes between first-, second-, and third- person authenticities, which respectively are authenticated by one's own experience (as in “confessional” songwriting), by closeness to the listener's experience (the ability to “tell it like it is”), or by the successful performance of an external musical tradition (e.g. the

white British rock musician Eric Clapton “authentically” playing the blues) (2002). Authenticity is often called upon in order to distinguish one genre from another, and particularly to separate rock from pop. Frith argues that “the myth of authenticity [is] one of rock’s own ideological effects, an aspect of its sales process”, which draws from both folk and art ideologies in order to posit itself as representing “the community of youth” and also “individual, creative sensibility” (2007, p.259). As Leach notes, this “frequently involves exaggerating the traits of the commercially dominant form” (2001, p.143); Moore argues, perhaps reductively, that “this commercial/authentic polarity is illusory, since all mass-mediated music is subject to commercial imperatives” (Moore 2002, p.218).

Many forms of authenticity might fruitfully be considered to be a response to the “illusory” dichotomy established between rock and pop, inasmuch as their own authenticity is based on questioning the validity of this distinction. One such response comes from indie (a genre with close historical links to DIY, which I address later), which highlights that rock’s aesthetic of rebellious freedom belies the level of organisational standardisation and complicity with the music industry that exists “behind” the music. Indie authenticity emphasises the genre’s organisational difference, drawing on Taylor’s “authenticity of positionality” (Taylor 1997, p.22-3) and the veracity offered by not “selling out” (which links to considerations of cultural autonomy highlighted in the previous chapter). In short, indie aims to do to rock what rock aims to do to pop: to reveal its structural and ideological role, with emphasis on its commodity-status. It is important to understand that organisational and aesthetic considerations cannot be neatly separated out — even with its specific organisational politics, indie still needs to *sound* authentic. So for example, the “lo-fi” sound of indie (and DIY) releases might be a consequence of organisational factors (i.e. a small recording budget, or a lack of interest in a “commercial sound”), but also creates a specific aesthetic which seems to “embody” its politics (Encarnacao 2007). This of course then has the potential to be co-opted, and drawn into “cycles of waxing and waning authenticities: the creation of an ‘authentic’ style, its transformation into a marketable commodity, followed by a push to renew authenticity by turning to a fresher style” (Dolan 2010, p.458). Indie therefore stakes (or has staked) its validity on both the specific conditions of its production and distribution (Hesmondhalgh 1999), and also on the heightened sensitivity and sincerity of its aesthetic (Dolan 2010).

Another critical response to rock authenticity is found in what Grossberg calls postmodern “meta-authenticity”, in which an awareness of rock’s manipulation of signs is utilised to create a counter “meta-reflexivity”. Grossberg also notes that “distance” is another technique for negotiating authenticity under conditions of postmodernity, as audiences reject displays of sincerity in favour of ironic detachment (1992, p.225). Notions of authenticity are further complicated by increasing genre hybridity in popular music, and the trend towards “poptimism” that has seen pop music and its specific forms of creativity (i.e. the “hit factory” model documented in Seabrook 2015) increasingly valorised within “alternative” critical circles (Rosen 2006). Leslie Meier’s work shows an increasing congruence between popular music and branding, a field in which authenticity is problematically “conceptualised as a business imperative”, providing an economically valuable “credible link” to “the world *outside* brands” (2011, p.409).

As I demonstrate in the rest of this chapter, different DIY scenes have distinct models of authenticity. They draw on techniques of “meta-authenticity” and “distancing” in order to critique rock, and particularly to critique its masculinist view of what constitutes “real” or “honest” performance. However, rock’s key cultural contributions and their purported political and social properties — the live show as a transformative experience, the band/group as a social unit, touring and the cultural connotations of being “on the road”, the electric guitar as a democratic tool — remain deeply potent, and have been highly influential on DIY scenes past and present. This provides a starting point for my consideration of DIY as a site of tension outlined in the following section: in critiquing rock’s use of authenticity, *a la* Frith, as a “sales process”, DIY still requires aesthetic signifiers of participation, resistance, and empowerment, and finds them most readily available within rock culture.

3.3 Developing a framework for analysis: DIY as a site of tension

It is not useful to think of DIY as an activity that is attempting to be in all instances the opposite of “normal” or “mainstream” music culture. Notions of authenticity, rebellion, social upheaval, and speaking truth to power have been encoded in pop and rock music

from at least the 1950s (Keightley 2001; Frith 1996b), and when DIY identifies pop music as an instrument of social change it is drawing upon lineages that are very much “within” the mainstream music industries, as well as upon more radical political and cultural lineages. The key cultural units of pop and rock music — the live show, the record, the band, the label, the audience — are similarly the key units of DIY, and whilst there have been attempts to deconstruct or subvert these concepts, they follow mainstream pop music inasmuch as they constitute a social movement which works not only *through* mass media, but *as* mass media. Therefore, when DIY music attempts to differentiate itself from mainstream music culture by, for example, combatting commodification by producing individually hand-stamped record sleeves, it ought to be seen as response to a problem arising from its own inextricability from the culture that it critiques.

DIY music rarely offers a complete program for social change. It is important to acknowledge that DIY music has a coherence with and affinity to popular music forms, texts, and infrastructures, and that this is a critical part of its character. The aim is more often to create a pop music culture in microcosm, that shifts the terrain in some way, without seeking to argue with the nature of music’s communicative power — e.g. “pop music... *but without exploitation*”, or “pop music... *but queer*”. In this way DIY music must be seen as distinctive (though not entirely separate) from folk and traditional musics, whose ideal form is both uncommodified and unmediated, valuing oral history, tradition, and direct communication, ideally both predating and bypassing the music industries. DIY music is a response to commodification and to media power which deals primarily in commodified, mediated communication.

Much of the tension within DIY stems from this fundamental contradiction. As such, it is important to understand that DIY and other music cultures will often have shared interests (e.g. the ongoing campaign to preserve and protect live music venues from the effects of urban “renewal”), even as they differ in other areas. It is also important to note that the relationship between art and commerce is also recognised as problematic *within* the music industries. Musicians in this professional sphere experience this tension, indeed arguably more so than DIY practitioners, as they find themselves channelled and controlled by management structures (Hesmondhalgh & Baker 2011; Banks 2007). DIY in this way can be seen as one point on a continuum which also

includes resistance that takes place within the industry, rather than as oppositional to a perfectly functioning, self-contained system.

In part then, the challenges faced by DIY stem from the difficulty of being resistant to, whilst also operating in tandem with, the music industry, as well as from the difficulty of being anti-capitalist within capitalism, and from the difficulty of creating social change from within a small pocket of that society. I therefore suggest that it is useful to theorise that DIY is operating in a state of tension, where its precarity leads to what might be considered an incompleteness in its ideology — DIY is often caught between two stools without a way of extricating itself. In identifying these tensions, the point is not to call out hypocrisy but rather to show how DIY scenes are defined by their responses as, when asked repeatedly to reconcile the irreconcilable, they lean one way or the other, and thus leave some shape which constitutes their identity, a map of their surrounding situation as much as their own action. In outlining the four themes below, the intention is to develop a framework that might highlight how different scenes do resistance differently as a result of identifying different aims and historically specific adversaries.

Production and consumption

DIY culture holds that cultural production is a form of power, and that the existing structure of cultural production both represents and constitutes an unequal and problematic power balance. Taking control of production (and often distribution) is the cornerstone of DIY ideology, which other central concepts — autonomy, inclusivity, anti-commercialism — build upon. Yet the power ascribed to the commodity form within DIY — the three-minute pop song as a life-changing experience — is an acknowledgement of the power inherent in cultural consumption, taking that to be the process of receiving symbolic communication, and through a process of negotiation with the communicator, arriving at an interpretation that might have consequences on identity, affinity to social groups, and political consciousness, amongst other things.

This being the case, DIY scenes have to address the issue of what happens — psychologically, politically, socially — to those who consume DIY-made media. That is, they need to consider the extent to which DIY practitioners might be able to create

commodities that have a particular relationship to ideas of exploitation and alienation, and which might defy their commodity status to transmit more context, more reality, or truth content than mainstream media. Attempts to communicate “authentically” might lead to decisions about modes of production, distribution, and the settings in which consumption occurs. Resistance through production might entail giving as many people as possible the opportunity to create music themselves or to share ownership of production and distribution channels. Resistance through consumption might posit DIY as a better form of consumer media — creating an experience of consumption that allows for a fuller kind of self-realisation, and which avoids the pitfalls of commodification.

Insularity and openness

Music communities have been variously theorised as network (Crossley 2015), scene (Bennett 2004), and subculture (Hodkinson 2002), and each of these suggests a different way of thinking about what constitutes the “inside” or “outside” of a music community, and also the way in which its borders are manifest (Stahl 2004) — I justify my own usage of “scene” in Chapter 1.2. In each case there is an inside and an outside, however porous, where the nature of the interactions between the two serve to help define what that music community is. The “outside”, for DIY music, might refer to mainstream music culture, other scenes, or society at large, and boundaries might be drawn along lines of genre, ethics, identity, age, or any number of other complex markers. In DIY, there is often a tension between the desire to create change beyond its borders, and the desire to consolidate the often hard-fought gains made within the community. Scenes can be zealous in winning new converts, or they can be isolationist. When confronted with a problem or some opposition, they might resist by confronting it, or they might resist by sealing themselves off from it.

Various modes of distribution might offer different levels of opportunity interaction, friction, altercation, and resistance. Some distribution channels might be shared with other scenes, and some might be exclusive to the scene. They might be closely controlled by gatekeepers, or they might be open to use by anyone. Modes of production and distribution might also affect the level of commitment required to be part of the scene — whether it is closer to the fully immersive consistency of a

subculture, or the postmodern fluidity of a “styletribe” (Bennett 2004). These are also decisions around whether to be “overt” or “covert”, the level of visibility that the scene ought to have, and the role that safety and security plays that is desired. Decisions made about where to perform, how to publicise, and what music to play, all work towards constructing a scene that is either more open or more closed. This might also affect a scene’s ability to cross-organise with other political movements, and the forms that this takes.

The tension between openness and insularity is a consistent feature of DIY scenes, and responses have varied depending on specific goals and situations. Resistance might take place through the creation of a safe haven for political and aesthetic development, or through opening up the scene to confrontation and debate. Being too insular might lead to a limited capacity for change, as well as accusations of elitism and irrelevance. On the other hand, a DIY scene that is too open might be insufficiently distant from mainstream culture, and therefore struggle to challenge existing cultural norms, or to generate its own forms of legitimacy within the scene.

Community and the individual

Music has the capacity to enhance a sense of belonging within a community (Shank 2014), and also to provide individual fulfilment through the craft of musical experimentation and achievement (Sennett 2009). These issues feed into aesthetic questions — whether the aim is to satisfy an audience by accurately representing them, or whether self-expression is the aim even when this might result in a failed communication between artist and audience. The organisation of popular music also tends to produce hierarchies — good and bad music, popular and unpopular artists — and this is a challenge for DIY scenes that often emphasise equal (or equivalent) participation and yet also seek produce music of merit and meaning.

These are issues of representation and particularly of mediated representation, and the extent to which individuals or groups can act as spokespeople for the scene. Artists’ individual success might be validated due to their position as an embodiment of the scene, or they might be instead find techniques of reducing hierarchal structures through altering modes of communication. This connects to questions around how music is

attributed to individuals or to groups, and to questions of ownership and copyright. DIY scenes might emphasise individual freedom by allowing for a large range of different opinions and roles within the scene, or emphasis a tightly-knit community with a similarity of views.

Resourcefulness and refusal

DIY often implies productive activity, and the conscious striving to create something in a different fashion. The notion of a “labour of love” (as opposed to paid work) carries with it connotations of long, hard work for little reward (Banks 2007), and in DIY these are often linked to ideas of self-sufficiency and triumphing through the maximisation of meagre resources (Dunn 2012). But DIY is also related to ideas of music-as-leisure, which might lead to different attitudes to work and exertion.

This tension between resourcefulness and refusal is similar to that of insularity and openness, in that it raises questions about the value of exposure and growth. However, it also accesses a different, deeper set of questions about the political value of action. The idea of refusal in other academic literature is often inferred by reference to Herman Melville’s *Bartleby*, an apathetic and inactive (non-)worker whose mantra is “I would prefer not to” (Casemajor et al. 2015); his inaction eventually results in his death from starvation, demonstrating a perverse dedication to resisting external authority. Refusal in DIY involves questioning the very nature of action and productivity, potentially seeing all activity as grist for the capitalist’s mill, and cultural production as *a priori* commodified and exploited.

In this context we might see a version of DIY that is predicated not on action but on inaction, a “slacker” approach that might be manifested through (lack of) promotion, distribution, and taking the easiest route. It also refers to questions of how music interacts with lifestyle, and the extent to which DIY is not necessarily a thoroughly theorised world-view, but simply the most convenient way of doing music as a hobby or leisure activity. This also links to notions of standardisation and rationality — often positioned as antithetical to autonomy and creativity (Banks 2007) — choosing refusal might be related to questions about the possibility for messiness and counter-rationality in DIY practice.

Thinking about resourcefulness and refusal might also lead to questions about time, urgency, stasis, and the way in which scenes think about growth and productivity. This also relates to positions on legality and illegality, legitimacy and validation, and amateurism and professionalism, and how these issues affect aesthetic decisions. Resourcefulness might offer room for resistance through the construction of alternative music communities that are expansive, inclusive, and proactive. Refusal might offer an alternative method of mitigating capitalism through opting-out, albeit in a way that leaves little room for a grand narrative of wider social change.

These four tensions, then, provide a means of assessing and comparing the forms of cultural resistance offered by different DIY scenes. In the following case studies I apply this framework to three historical DIY scenes.

3.4 Case study 1: UK post-punk 1978-83

Andy Gill (the journalist, not the Gang of Four guitarist), writing in 1978, describes punk as “a kind of musical laxative”. “Music cannot live on laxative alone”, he continues, “and the problem now seems to be one of what diet to pursue” (Gill 1978). In this context, post-punk music did not just mount an economic challenge to the major labels, but also questioned ideas of what pop music ought to be, of what bands *were*, and what they were for. DIY emerges in this context as one amongst many new models of music-making being trialled by practitioners hungry for new ideas. DIY in this period was perhaps closer to the mainstream than at any other time (particularly in the UK), but also harder to separate out from other musical worlds. This period, lasting until around 1980-1, was replaced by one in which a clearer distinction emerged between DIY and other approaches (primarily indie and New Pop), and in which DIY became more stable and more separate, at the expense of its broader cultural relevance.

Production and consumption

Where punk had highlighted much of contemporary pop culture as boring and hypocritical, post-punk attempts to critique consumerism in this period are closely tied

to Lukacs' conception of "false consciousness" and Gramscian notions of hegemony, explicitly locating themselves in a Marxist critique of the culture industry as playing a fundamental role in maintaining worker passivity and compliance. This critique did not always come from bands with a DIY approach — Gang of Four offer a particularly bleak vision of "Entertainment!", released on EMI — but Scritti Politti were the band who most effectively, for a time, talked the talk and walked the walk. Their sonic adherence to the "access aesthetic" of punk was tied with an attempt to take this "access" into extra-musical territory, and to demystify the back-end of record production. The Desperate Bicycles and The Buzzcocks were two notable punk bands who had self-released in 1977, with the former including their production costs in order to encourage others to follow suit, but Scritti Politti were most able to locate this DIY activity within a wider political frame. As well as being openly and explicitly Marxist, their living situation (communal), as well as their re-thinking of band membership (again, communal, involving non-musician contributors having input on their decision-making), suggested that they were political actors working through music, rather than vice versa.

Gestures of deconstruction and consumerism critique are a stylistic feature of post-punk in this period (e.g. XTC's smarmy, all-text album cover for 1978's *Go 2*, which declares that album covers are "TRICKS and this is the worst TRICK of all since it's describing the TRICK whilst trying to TRICK you"). This arguably lessened the sense of DIY record production as a radically separate from other modes of musical production, instead positioning it as one approach amongst many in the rush to demonstrate media-savvy leftist credentials. DIY bands, however, were in a position to take this further than their counterparts with commitments to labels.

DIY releases (including by Desperate Bicycles and Scritti Politti) often came with pamphlets documenting itemised production and recording costs. For example, The Door and the Window's 1979 "Subculture" EP includes a flyer entitled "How We Did It", showing costs including photo development and printing, recording, mastering, and also including the areas where they avoided paying through their own activity ("collated sleeves ourselves"), and through favours ("recording equipment loaned by friend") (Ogg 2009, pp.131–2). The focus here is on transparency as a means of defeating commodification, as though breaking the commodity back into its component parts

might have a less alienating effect than presenting it as springing into being fully formed. What they don't tend to show is where they got the money from. Roger Sabin has suggested that punk tended to rely on benefactors, be they "managers" or "mum" (quoted in Ogg 2009, pp.132–33), and in many cases this start-up cash was from student grants (Ogg 2009, p.127), perhaps demonstrating how pre-existing cultural capital was necessary for this type of "access". Additionally, even whilst the production was demystified, the aesthetic content of these records remained very much *mystified* (or mystifying) — the product of middle-class art students attempting to over-intellectualise the pop song.

This critique of entertainment as encouraging passivity resulted in the removal of song elements that might be seen as populist, such as repeated choruses, or conventional chord structures. This is evidenced in Wire's manifesto, which is entirely based on negation — "no chorussing out"; "when the words run out, it stops". Post-punk practitioners created *failed consumer products*, and in this way attempted to bring up questions about the role of consumption in society — a pop song that doesn't fulfil its function necessarily raises questions about what its function ought to be.

Post-punk is also characterised by an emphasis on experimentation. Simon Reynolds recalls feeling that, in the post-punk period, "there was simply no earthly reason to investigate the past" (2005, p.xiv). Gracyk notes that practitioners were working towards new styles of music, but moving in highly different directions, and "until others imitated particular cases and, through copying, established a pattern of rules, no one could yet tell what those styles were" (2012, p.83). A lack of clear genre markers meant a lack of context on which to situate value judgements around "good" and "bad" music. In the meantime, there was a strong emphasis on creative play, experimental process, and attempting to deconstruct and subvert aesthetic norms.

One of the key ideological elements of post-punk was the attempted deconstruction of the "rockist" mindset, especially within the music press. This meant calling into question the signifiers of authenticity within rock, critiquing the extent to which these tropes had become an empty performance, and also understanding their gestures of intimacy as an attempt to mask the commodity form of popular music. This rockist conception of authenticity was also identified as specifically male, and therefore

practitioners identified the feminist significance of not only dismantling it, but also replacing it. Female post-punk musician Linder Sterling recalls: “we were trying to find a new vocabulary” (O’Brien 2012, p.33).

A live review of Scritti Politti from 1979 argues that their performance represents

demystification in action; praxis. [...] There were songs spilling over, splitting apart, lots of subtle resonances, invention and courage. [...] they're questioning what's normally taken for granted, accepted as 'second nature' in beat music: a blatantly silly idea to cut away at. What's being taken apart is rock 'n' roll's daft trad codes [...] A reconstituted audience/performance relation is being aimed for. There are problems and contradictions — but they're important ones, decisive ones, decisions, conversations. (Gill & Penman 1979)

The discourse of experimentation here validates the “problems and contradictions” as “important”, because they constitute part of the trial-and-error method that is necessary for the evidence-based construction of future music.

Practitioners moved towards a broadly expressionist understanding of the self, positioning the music of post-punk as a direct expression of anguish far more honest than the apparently authentic gestures of rock, which were in fact empty, and learned by rote: evidence not of the authentic self, but of internalising and reproducing norms. In this way authenticity is tied to experimentation, an expression of an inner anguish so acute that it necessitates a move beyond verse-chorus formalism. The claim, as with expressionism, is that oblique, abstract, and unfamiliar forms might better represent the human condition than familiar tropes and techniques (seeing performances of rock authenticity as merely going through the motions), and thus act as a more authentic reflection of lived experience. The conflation of rockist discourse with the Marxist critique of the cultural industries would eventually lead to key DIY practitioners (notably Scritti Politti’s Green Gartside) abandoning radical rock expressionism in favour of effective pop communication — arguably, with no concept of authenticity, they also had no concept of selling out — leading to the commercially successful New Pop movement, and Gartside ridiculing DIY practitioners’ expressionism as “failed attempts at music” (Reynolds 2005, p.366).

Part of the reason for this boom in experimentation might be that punk and post-punk arrived during an extraordinary period for record-buying — vinyl sales reached their worldwide peak c.1978; five of the top ten best-selling singles of all-time in the UK were released between 1975-78 (and *two* were by Boney M). Paul Rosen posits 1981 as the point at which the market became so “flooded” with DIY releases that an edition of one thousand singles was no longer “guaranteed” to sell out (1997, p.8). Before then, however, the economic feasibility of releasing a DIY record in this formative period was massively boosted by a substantial audience, particularly attentive to new rock trends in the wake of punk, who would buy, it seems, virtually anything pressed onto vinyl. Indie label owners were therefore freer to share artistic concerns of their artists, rather than commercial ones; Robin Dallaway of The Cravats recalls of Small Wonder label boss Pete Stennett: “he knows we’d never write a blatantly commercial song, and he’d never want us to” (Ogg 2009, p.140). Particularly if the only aim was to recoup costs rather than make profit then, in this forgiving economic environment, there was little pressure to conform in order to find an audience, allowing experimentation to thrive in the absence of the financial pressures that often restrict it.

Insularity and openness

The landscape of musical culture in the UK after punk’s brief time in the limelight was in a period of re-shaping, with the legacy of its “access aesthetic” spurring on new theories and approaches concerning the future direction of pop music. In hindsight, we can see within this period the emergence of three quite separate strands of musical culture — *post-punk* as a genre, offering experimental, reflexive techniques in an attempt to construct modernist and expressionist music; *indie* as a newly politicised incarnation of a music industry organisational form; and *DIY* as a political solution to the stultifying effects of mainstream popular culture consumption. Within fifteen years, these three terms would be easily distinguishable as representing substantially separate fields, and indeed would be recognisable as three separate, albeit related, genres of popular music. But at the time the similarities between these fields, all in their formative stages, all seeking to present new models for musical activity after punk, temporarily led to a landscape in which they seemed to be operating on shared ground, moving towards common goals. Young entrepreneurs, anti-capitalist students, relics from 1960’s counterculture (especially in the form of independent record shop owners), and

also from 1970s pre-punk music (particularly ‘art’ musicians who were ill-suited to punk’s primitivism), were united within a music scene that coalesced around broad ideas of change.

At this time, DIY cultural products such as fanzines, records, and concerts are best understood as a part of a music world in which paid and unpaid practitioners co-operated frequently and in various ways. This mingling of amateurs and professionals is always a feature of the cultural industries (Miège 1989, p.24), but to a relatively greater extent in this period, and distinctions which at other times have operated as the border of “in” and “out” for DIY were blurry and of lesser importance than other eras. NME writers of this period had often started as fanzine authors (and many continued to maintain this role alongside their more professional work); bands within the same scenes made vastly different choices regarding their association with major labels, but remained closely connected; many record shops stocked releases big and small without differentiation. Even whilst post-punk was in general resisting a model of independence in which they acted as talent pools for the majors (Hesmondhalgh 1997, p.257), there were notable exceptions, such as Bob Last of indie label Fast Product encouraging acts like Gang of Four to sign with majors at the earliest possible opportunity. The desire to aesthetically change the content of the pop charts and the desire to restructure the economics of the music business (and, in some cases, the wider world) seemed interlinked and equally valid. Understandings of what constituted resistance or alternative culture were in flux.

As it happened, post-punk, indie, and DIY all shared a tendency towards insularity, but for different reasons. Post-punk’s musical inaccessibility restricted its audience to those “in the know”; indie (until labels successfully scaled up) lacked the infrastructure to secure greater exposure; DIY was additionally limited by inherently ramshackle form and content, as well as political motives for keeping control over all aspects of production and distribution. For those who had been enthralled by punk’s radical disruption of mainstream culture, any move towards insularity seemed akin to defeat. Music journalist Garry Bushell was a harsh critique of what he called the “safe little games” of experimental post-punk, instead arguing for the visceral populism of Oi! as the true continuation of punk and its radical expression of working-class anger. He asks derisively:

Can anyone actually show us what great breakthroughs the Fall have made? Or Scritti Politti? Or Public Image? Oh wow, metal boxes, how revolutionary. Oh golly, I say chaps, let's start playing cotton reels, soup cans, bits of broken brick – that'll really screw up the system (not to mention the stylus). What's the answer, saps? Suicide? Seminars on Vegetarian Lesbians. Against Neo-Nazi Marketing Devices! Aw, go play with yer toys. (Bushell 1980)

The public-school language (“golly [...] chaps”) suggests that post-punkers were the equivalent of laconic nineteenth-century amateurs, dabbling in music for fun because they could afford to, with nothing really at stake, the imagery of “toys” deftly implying that post-punk was functionally useless — fine for *play*, but no use for the real thing. The distasteful, side-swiping tone aside (managing to decry academia, animal welfare, gay rights, anti-fascism and anti-consumerism all within eight words is, regardless of its accuracy, an impressive feat of economy), Bushell successfully identifies communication, and specifically mass communication, as a key function of pop music, and one which punk had achieved through, in part, an accessible and identifiable sound. Post-punk, for all of its aspirations to radicalise music, could never successfully speak to a broad audience, and specifically one unsympathetic to its high-brow allusions and its discomfort at being commodified. Along similar lines, but with an economic rather than aesthetic critique, Malcolm McLaren labelled Rough Trade as mere “grocers” (Reynolds 2005, pp.310–11) — skewering the holier-than-thou status of owner-operator capitalism, whilst also identifying their limited capacity impact on a wider public.

It was around this time, 1980-81, that indie — that is, the now relatively stable set of independent labels and the expansive national and international distribution networks they had created — *did* attempt to achieve successful communication with a mass audience. Indie and DIY began to branch apart, as the difference in cost and method between the two became greater. (Post-punk to some extent fell by the wayside as a historical moment, rather than an *approach* to music-making, although as a genre it has specific musical features and aesthetic sensibilities that remain identifiable today.)

Nonetheless, for the period 1978-81, a DIY release stood a high chance of being featured in the weekly music press (then reaching an audience of two million (Reynolds 2005, p.xxvii), played on BBC Radio 1 by a John Peel show at the height of its powers

(Peel identifies the late seventies as “the only time the programme was fashionable” (Perrone 2014)), and stocked in a network of independent and specialist record shops across the UK (which were rapidly proliferating in this time (Hesmondhalgh 1997)). This period of openness arguably came to an end with the advent, circa 1981, of specific columns in the music press dedicated to reviewing tape releases, demos, and unsigned bands (“Garageland” in the *NME*, and “Cassette Pets” in *Sounds*) (Rosen 1997). Here, DIY releases became distinguished as a different type of music, to be evaluated in their own specific context, rather than being measured against the big, *actual* records that formed music culture proper. The decision, in the 1981 edition of the Small Labels Catalogue, to no longer include reggae labels (instead moving them to a separate standalone publication), further suggests that by this time DIY was by this time a specific cultural cul-de-sac — a step removed from other musics both ethically and aesthetically (Marlow & Taylor, 1980). DIY aspirations became, in various senses, scaled down. Home recording equipment was cheaper and easier than booking studio time, but the sound quality suffered as a result. Producing small tape runs was far less risky than committing to press one-thousand copies on vinyl but lessened the sense of DIY releases as being on a par, in terms of legitimacy, with mainstream releases. Rather than the attempt of mavericks to do it just like the majors did, DIY by the early eighties was its own, insular scene: music made in bedrooms, by nobodies, for no-one. By 1984, Simon Reynolds writes in the fanzine *Monitor* of a scene that had “ceased to make assaults on the outside world” (Reynolds, 1984). The moral panic that punk had caused, and which had temporarily made further, similar disruptions seem feasible, had not been replicated, and non-conformist music had settled back into being a niche taste culture.

Community and the individual

The democratising impetus within post-punk can be seen as having two facets — one directed towards democracy within and between the units of production (bands, zines, labels), and one aimed at minimising the distance between these units and their audience, and in doing so reducing the disparity of cultural power between them.

When Gang of Four talk about democratic rock they are talking about the former — the group as a collective expression (“Gang of Four doesn’t believe in the individual” (Reynolds 2005, p.114)), and the music as reflecting that in equality in interactivity of

their instruments' musical parts (Harron 1979). This is not really about democracy in the DIY sense of encouraging participation from all, but rather democracy as a creative method. Similarly, Scritti Politti's refusal to identify where the band began and ended, including within its borders "a large circle of close friends who provide help, disruption, money for drinks, encouragement and criticism" (Penman 1978), was primarily presented as a novel means of musical decision-making. Zines were often collective efforts, and although generally under the control of an editor, they generally took an approach to creativity that was less focussed on individual ownership, instead favouring shared contribution. Lashua and Cohen note of the *Merseysound* zine, "it isn't always readily clear who contributed to each issue; by-lines don't regularly appear with features and there is no list of 'staff'" (2012, p.90). The implication is that of a shared viewpoint, in which each contributor stands in for all the others. Rough Trade operated, initially, as a workers' co-operative, in an "unprecedented attempt to create internal record company democracy" (Hesmondhalgh 1997, p.266). This internal democracy or collectivity does not necessarily relate to a democratisation of the wider cultural field. In fact, arguably, the intra-unit democracy makes them better candidates for a position within a *representative* democracy, where their internal democracy symbolically stands in for wider equality.

These collective creative endeavours do not necessarily reconstitute the performer-audience relationship. An *NME* review of the Futurama festival in 1979 ironically notes the failure of punk and post-punk to dismantle the cultural chasm between audience and performer: "the entire backstage area was cleared so that PiL could evade the prying eyes of the plebs. During the clearing operation, a girl was said to have had her nose broken. Boy, am I glad the star-system crumbled in 1977!" (Gill & Penman 1979).

Geoff Travis of Rough Trade, speaking in *Melody Maker* in 1979, demonstrates the desire of indie labels to address this distance: "what's important, obviously, is to get rid of the idea that it's important to be a star, and to make the funnel wider, so as to include as many people and ideas as possible" (Birch 1979). However, Rough Trade's position as an intermediary between producer and consumer made this difficult, as Travis notes in the same interview: "say your best friend writes a novel, and you think it's absolute rubbish, and you set yourself up as a publishing company. What do you do?" (Birch 1979). The idea that it is "obvious" to "make the funnel wider" is immediately called

into question, as Travis identifies the dilemma of choosing between the promotion of participation and equality, and the intertwined values of aesthetic quality, financial common-sense, customer satisfaction, and curatorial pride. Here we can perhaps see a slight separation of an “indie” approach from the “DIY” calls for direct participation. The Desperate Bicycles’ second single contained an insert with the names of all the people who had contacted them about how to make a record, with the instruction “now it’s your turn” acting as a kind of “calling out” of their audience to rise to the challenge and follow through on their initial enthusiasm (Selzer 2012). This does the work of imagining direct democracy for the audience by reversing the temporality of cultural production, with the audience being in some sense “credited” on a record on the basis of a future record they would hopefully go on to make.

Nonetheless Rough Trade did, through its multiple functions as shop, label, and distro, become a central hub of importance beyond the bands it released in a label capacity. Rough Trade acted as a physical meeting-point (Reynolds 2005, p.213), collecting mail for zines (*Ripped & Torn #5*, 1977), offering paid work to band members, offering a means of national distribution for DIY records. Even as it worked to create a star-system which maintained distance between artists and audience, it also acted as a hub for DIY activity and kept this community in touch. Whilst post-punk was often pilloried for replacing the communality of punk with an emphasis on individual self-expression (Reynolds writes of musician and zine author Mark Perry’s “metamorphosis”, in the eyes of punks, “from working-class hero into bourgeois art-wanker” (2005, p.79)), it was more successful than punk in terms of creating and connecting a network of non-professional music practitioners across a wider geographical area, albeit as a scene rather than a focussed “movement”.

Resourcefulness and refusal

Post-punk has been widely understood as the reconstruction project following punk’s deconstruction, the move from “no future” to building one, with associated implications of a more stable political project than punk’s nihilistic refusal. That is an oversimplification of what was (for both punk and post-punk) a broad church, but in general post-punk moved towards rules (Mankowski notes the prevalence of post-punk bands with manifestos (2014)), and the sense of a more coherent political project.

Political movements from both the left- and the right-wing saw the post-punk (and remaining punk) music scene as a place for launching recruitment drives (Reynolds 2005, p.123), and this sense of music as a battleground was often realised in a literal sense. O'Brien recalls that violence was "endemic" to the Leeds scene of that time, and describes National Front activists entering Mekons and Gang of Four gigs and "goose-stepping" (2012). For all that Garry Bushell attacked the post-punk scene as "safe", there was occasionally an element of physical danger involved, in part as a result of the scene's connection to broader political movements. However, Reynolds notes that bands were sceptical of Rock Against Racism as too *purely* political (2005, p.128). The inappropriateness of pop music as the medium for delivering complex political thought was often acknowledged, and particularly in the live environment where lyrics were generally inaudible (Harron 1979). This might be seen not as a rejection of wider political affiliation, but rather a suspicion of culture being instrumentalised and the subsequent loss of capacity for self-expression.

As mentioned above, the desire to "storm the charts" positioned post-punk as an aesthetic challenge to the mundanity of chart music. The experimental or radical nature of this music was often held up as proof of its cultural and political importance. Academic and contemporary DIY practitioner Pete Dale critiques Simon Reynolds' "indexing of musical quality to radical novelty" (i.e., the newer, the better), and it is helpful to think of Reynolds as a music critic and historian operating with a specifically post-punk approach (Dale 2013). There is very little critique within post-punk of the ways in which capitalism might benefit from the obsolescence generated by post-punk's restless forward motion.

In later years, as indie and DIY became more separate from post-punk, the newness-value of music would cease to be such an important consideration in measuring its resistant or alternative qualities. Names of small record labels in this later period reflect their oppositional status to the music industry either through ironic statements of ambition (World Domination Enterprises), or less ironic statements of apathy (Fuck Off Records), or highlighting their own impermanence or perilous financial state (Deleted Records' claim to be "the world's most unprofitable record company") (Dale 2014). Such names demonstrate their lack of interest in growth, and perhaps comment on the

inappropriateness of the label (a product of the music industry) as an organisation within this sphere of small-scale production.

3.5 Case study 2: U.S. post-hardcore indie (1983-88)

Two of the best histories of U.S. indie music, Michael Azerrad's *Our Band Could Be Your Life* (2001) and Gina Arnold's *Route 666: The Road to Nirvana* (1993), identify a mid-period between punk and grunge (the two opposing ends of Arnold's titular "road") as a golden age in which indie music flourished largely under the radar, participation levels (and record sales) were remarkably high, and mainstream crossover was virtually zero. They identify this slow-burning movement as culminating in the mainstream co-option of its sound and style, although they differ over whether this ought to be considered as a success or a failure for the scene.

There is no single term which neatly unifies the genre or scene of this time. Gina Arnold uses the term "Amerindie" (denoting a shift away from the Anglocentrism of much punk and new-wave), and Azerrad simply calls it "the underground". In primary sources, especially zines, "punk" and "hardcore" (or "HC") is still used to describe music which in genre terms is far from it. The term "college rock" becomes common towards the late eighties, denoting the importance of college radio, as well as highlighting the increasing presence of "norms" (i.e. non-punks) within the scene, altering its relationship to class politics and intellectualism. The scene pre-dated the term "alternative", which, like "grunge", carries an implication of rock as a major-label marketing category.

I use the term "post-hardcore indie" to highlight how all its key practitioners "passed through" hardcore punk, even as many ended up far beyond its restrictive genre boundaries. As a very young scene, many of its participants being under eighteen, hardcore practitioners grew up, grew apart, took the "do-it-yourself" ethos and applied it within new genres. Even those with no personal attachment to hardcore were working within a framework established by the hardcore scene. Black Flag, a California hardcore band formed in 1976, are credited as having "built" the DIY touring network in the early eighties through their willingness to break new ground, taking chances in new

towns and building relationships across the country. Labels like SST and Dischord, which were founded as local hardcore labels, became the prominent indies within a scene that was stylistically much broader than punk. Zines like *Flipside* and *Maximum Rock'n'Roll (MRR)* began with a focus on hardcore, before branching out to cover a broader spectrum of indie rock. In order to understand the scene it is necessary to position it in relation to hardcore in order to understand its position in relation to the mainstream, and to ideas of individual freedom and group solidarity.

My analysis begins in 1983 because this is identified in multiple accounts (Andersen & Jenkins 2001, p.166; Azerrad 2001, p.312) as the year in which hardcore punk, having emerged in Washington D.C. and California around 1980, appeared to many to be “played out”. Musicians and audiences began to question the more dogmatic elements of hardcore’s style and sound, as well as the seemingly irresolvable intra-scene divisions between skinheads, punks, and straight-edgers. Following this, there was a rapid acknowledgement and acceptance of non-punk musical influences, looking back beyond 1976 (punk’s year zero) to country, psychedelia, and classic rock. This led to a period of relative stability, in terms of the scene’s approach to DIY ethics, which I identify as ending in 1988, the year when Sonic Youth and R.E.M. made the jump to major labels (although the latter were previously on I.R.S, an indie with major label distribution), and the year when Sub Pop became an incorporated company and hype began to build around a “Seattle sound”, moving closer to the breakthrough (by Nirvana amongst others) that would significantly change the indie scene.

Production and consumption

Ryan Moore, in an article on punk as a (Bourdieuian) field of cultural production, identifies differences between “deconstructive” and “constructive” strands of punk, in which the former emphasises bricolage and subverting and recycling signs, and the latter aims for authenticity through insulating the scene from mainstream superficiality (Moore 2007). It is the latter that relies more heavily upon a do-it-yourself ethos, in order to demonstrate the authentic expression has not been corrupted by financial interests. The U.S. indie scene, as well as the hardcore scene that preceded it, drew far more upon a “constructive” DIY authenticity rather than the Situationist culture-jamming of art-punk.

The financial struggle of DIY production became a key means of demonstrating authenticity and commitment, because, as Corey Rusk of Touch and Go Records notes, “you couldn’t have done it if you didn’t love it” (Azerrad 2001, p.281). Bob Mould of Hüsker Dü identified a mentality within hardcore punk of “who can have it worse?” (Azerrad 2001, p.178), particularly demonstrated through the close identification of music and personal life due to financial necessity (i.e. sleeping and living in the record label “office”; hosting record “folding parties”). This also led to a kind of economic sincerity, in which finances were often discussed openly in order to demonstrate a lack of distance between artist and audience, and to show that there was no exploitation taking place by bands or labels at the expense of fans. An advert in *MRR* #13 begins “This is an ad for New Underground Records. It’s costing me \$50.00 to tell you about our new products” (Maximumrocknroll #13, May 1984, p.24), using clarity and transparency in an attempt to bypass the more manipulative aspects of advertising. Similarly, in *MRR* #7, Jello Biafra of Dead Kennedys responds in the letters page to a fan questioning their high ticket prices with a thorough breakdown of all costs incurred by the band (Maximumrocknroll #7, July-August 1983, p.8).

The live show generally had primacy over recorded output. The Minutemen referred to all activity outside of the live show, including their recorded material, as “flyers” — their time being divided up between playing the show, and getting people to the show. Ian MacKaye similarly refers to Fugazi’s records as the “menu” and their live shows as the “meal”. The commercial element of records can in this way be downplayed, by positioning them as a means to an end, with the aim being to get people to the show where a more effective communication can take place.

A further way in which records were positioned as more than a product was by emphasizing their status as a document of their existence and their activity, seeking to impart a cultural status more akin to historical archive (or perhaps Lomax’s folksong collection) than ephemeral entertainment commodity. Ian MacKaye’s first band Teen Idles had already broken up when in 1980 they recorded a single, meaning they had very little chance of recouping their costs through selling copies at shows, but their intent is summarised by MacKaye as: “let’s document ourselves.” The foolishness of this decision from an economic standpoint serves to reinforce its cultural legitimacy. “I

was working all the time trying to pay for everything”, says MacKaye, ”but it was all about documentation” (Azerrad 2001, p.132). MacKaye’s label, Dischord, had a policy of releasing only local bands, documenting their own scene and in doing so avoiding the temptation to pick up bigger bands in order to increase sales. Jem Cohen’s feature-film documentary on Fugazi is called, plainly, “Document”.

This documentational approach was extended to the recording studio. Bands recorded with very few overdubs, and minimal studio effects, a “clean” sound produced partly to reduce costs, but also to ensure that records were an accurate representation of the performers’ ability rather than an opportunity for technological experimentation. This meant that they were an accurate “flyer” or “menu” for the live show. It also positioned them in opposition to the apparent dishonesty of mainstream productions, in which studio trickery constituted an economic investment in the manipulation of listeners in order to raise a band’s reputation (and earning power) beyond their “natural” ability. In keeping with the “workingman” persona identified by Faris (2004), a lack of technical manipulation also emphasised virtues of physicality, making the work of producing sound the visible result of human effort. Through adopting a documentational approach to recording and performing, practitioners presented their work as less mediated, less manipulated, and more human than mainstream music, reducing the distance between producer and consumer.

Insularity and openness

Unlike in the UK, where the Sex Pistols’ PR savvy ensured widespread TV and tabloid coverage, the US punk scene failed to explode into mainstream national culture (arguably until 1991, “The Year Punk Broke”). Although there was a moral panic over the nihilistic violence of hardcore, there was little focus on specific bands, or on the music itself. As a result, the indie scene developed largely without an understanding of how it might connect to the mainstream music industries. The refusal of many promoters to book hardcore bands necessitated the creation of an alternative network, which expanded through the early 1980s with minimal involvement from mainstream promoters, labels and the mainstream music press. Bob Mould claims that, at that time, “it wasn’t so much about ‘smash the system’ but ‘make our *own* system’” (Azerrad 2001, p.160). Cynthia Connolly, a D.C. photographer and historian, recalls: “it’s not

like they wanted to be rock stars. They wanted to just be there. Nobody thought in 1981 they were going to be a rock star. Nobody gave a flying fuck what you were doing with your friends, so that's a huge difference" (Kenney 2015).

In the second half of the decade, as audiences grew, and certain bands became leading lights within a DIY "star system", the cultural field of indie began to understand how success might happen, and it began increasingly to occupy the imagination. The scene went from not seeing outside success, to seeing a potential path, to finding it difficult to see anything else. Greg Ginn, through his ongoing activity in Black Flag and his label SST Records, was able to track the growth of this aspiration amongst bands in the scene, and attributed it directly to seeing success around them: "They started out with the ambition 'If we could just be a touring band and go around and do this, that would be cool [...] then R.E.M. came into it and it was like, 'Wow, we can make a career out of this.' There was a sharp turn" (Azerrad 2001, p.58). Although they were only tangentially linked to the DIY scene of the time, R.E.M. played a powerful role in the cultural imaginary of DIY practitioners, in terms of creating the possibility of a new and powerful definition of success. The Butthole Surfers recall that they were "jealous as shit" of R.E.M., to the extent that they moved to Athens, Georgia, in order to "stalk" them (Azerrad 2001, p.291). The punk zine *Book Your Own Fuckin' Life!*, in an open letter to Sony, acknowledges that major labels have got under the skin of the scene, in their admission that "you have probably made a wise advertising decision. You will probably get plenty of "punk/HC" bands who want to be next year's 'alternative' heroes... Fuck you very much" (Duncombe 2008, p.148).

Between 1983 and 1988, college radio developed from being an enclave for nerds to a music industry proving ground, replete with a cottage industry of pluggers and an increasingly influential trade magazine, *CMJ*. This new market also meant a new audience, marking what Azerrad calls "indie rock's transition from the working-class side of suburbia to the world of urban aesthetes" (2001, p.233). The U.K. music press also played a role, by affording greater artistic importance and influence to bands like Sonic Youth than they were used to receiving in the US. Arnold argues that the presence of a new audience affected the sense of their scene as resistant. "It puzzled and shook us, this invasion of the ordinary people: these were the people who'd hated us to begin with, the ones who'd driven us away. So how could our music appeal to them

too? How dare it even try?” (1993, p.124). Bands and other practitioners were, if successful, faced with the question of whether the promotion of their aesthetic into the mainstream would constitute a political meaningful act. Guy Picciotto, of Rites of Spring and Fugazi, reflects: “I can see there’s a point to getting good ideas into Rolling Stone, but when you’re sandwiched between a thousand bad ideas, I don’t think it translates” (Azerrad 2001, p.407).

Avoiding a mainstream audience changed from being something that was an accidental result of U.S. indie’s isolation, to something that had to be consciously maintained, and that involved self-reflexive analysis of one’s own motivation. Albini identified that the way that major labels co-opted the indie scene was not necessarily through financial exploitation but through altering your own mentality and approach, introducing new ideas of success and potential audience. This is evidenced by Bob Mould reflecting on Hüsker Dü’s move from indie to major, and touching upon the subtlety of this psychological impact: “you think, ‘Finally, we’re changing things.’ But you’re being changed *by* things as much as you’re changing things. It’s a two-way street. I only know this years later. At the time you have no idea — the tornado spins and if you can grab your shoes as they go by, you’re doing well” (Azerrad 2001, p.183). In response to this psychological threat, Albini’s band Big Black emphasised how little they sought or valued audience growth: “We are perfectly satisfied with the amount of people who like the band. It wouldn’t bother us at all if half that many did.” This served as a protective measure, meaning “we were invulnerable to ploys by music scene weasels to get us to make mistakes in the name of success” (Azerrad 2001, p.342).

Fugazi identified that “big bands that stay independent lend weight to the indie movement” and therefore their commitment to Dischord was part of their band’s politics, with MacKaye arguing that “the whole point is if you deal with yourself and people you can exert influence on”, the resistance therefore takes the form of “a mentality that will be beneficial to everybody else later on” (Azerrad 2001, p.134). This emphasises the importance of maintaining the “purity” of the scene taking priority over its exposure to new audiences. Both Arnold and Azerrad identify the importance of hippies as a lingering countercultural spectre haunting the indie scene, and a desire to avoid that movement’s co-option and reduction to stylistic touchstones as motivating indie’s insistence on insularity. The often-forceful rhetoric against “selling out” was

grounded in a complex understanding of their position in history, and a conscious attempt to provide a new approach to an old problem. Arnold notes reluctantly that “for all that time, we were too ashamed of the fate of hippie idealism to recognise our actual allegiance to it” (1993, p.125).

Community and the individual

Stephen Duncombe, author of a comprehensive history of zines, suggests that the “predicament” of punk “means you define yourself against society as an individual, but it also means that you define yourself as being part of a group, adhering to community standards” (2008, p.68). By 1983, hardcore was largely characterised by a “herd mentality”, with Really Red lead singer U-Ron (in a length *MRR* feature entitled “Does Punk Suck?”) noting that “sometimes when we tour it is very hard to tell if we are in a different town from the night before. Things get pretty predictable” (Maximumrockroll #13 May 1984, p.13). As bands made a conscious effort to break these norms, the relationship between bands and audience was often characterised as antagonistic. Black Flag, one of the first big hardcore bands to move away towards a slower, rockier sound, saw their live performance as a direct challenge of their audience, “forcing the crowd to submit to the will of the band — for longer than they could stand it” (Azerrad 2001, p.54). The Minutemen similarly saw their diverse and often bewildering punk-sounding music as challenging audience conceptions of anarchy and “no rules”. As hardcore progressed into post-hardcore, and aesthetic and stylistic markers of the scene diversified, self-expression gradually gained importance over punk’s community norms, and a more liberal approach meant a lower level of commitment was required to participate as a scene member.

Following that punk emphasis on community, larger zines like *Flipside* and *MRR* continued to act as a community noticeboard, with editorial content kept to a minimum in favour of diverse crowdsourced content. Issues of *MRR* from 1983 and 1984 usually contain ten to fifteen lengthy letters, which are in general addressed not “to the editors” but to the scene at large, with frequent use of “we”, and endless hand-wringing over where the scene was going wrong. The majority of the zine is made up of twenty to thirty pages of “scene updates”, reports on local scenes submitted by individual contributors, writing with excitement about new bands and upcoming gigs. In these

zines the sense of the scene as a “movement” is palpable — what is at stake is not just the happiness or capacity for self-realisation of a few individuals in the present-day, but a longer-term future of punk. They are also strikingly different from the “perzines” (personal zines) that would follow in riot grrrl and later DIY scenes, with a more journalistic tone focussed on coverage rather than self-analysis.

It is noticeable that most bands of this period do not have a dedicated lead singer (as opposed to punk and hardcore bands), and that songwriting duties were often shared between two or more members, or undertaken collectively. They also often lived together, and split money equally regardless of their differing roles. Steve Albini in particular was a keen believer in the band as a unit, arguing that musical “projects”, an alternative organisation of music-making which placed less emphasis on and more on an individual composer or band leader, “are one of the most offensive developments in music in the ‘80s and ‘90s.” He argued that musical projects “undermine the credibility of a rock band” as “social, political, and creative entities that have a life unto themselves, distinct from the lives of its members” (Faris 2004, p.434). This ties in with Ian MacKaye’s claim that “the process is such a huge part of the art” (Sinker 2001, p.22), emphasising the extra-musical elements of production and distribution, as well as the community from which the music arises.

Resourcefulness and refusal

As the young hardcore movement matured, and its key practitioners entered their twenties, many punks sought to distance themselves from the more destructive aspects of their scene. This meant not only a move away from physically violent behaviour, but also from the philosophy of refusal that characterises what Moore (2004) calls “deconstructive” punk, instead favouring longevity, stability, and a strong work ethic. The post-hardcore scene is associated with this kind of maturity, in which the emphasis is placed on a resourceful “building”. Mike Watt, bassist for The Minutemen, in a video interview from 1985, identifies the destructive elements of hardcore culture as inimical to his own understanding of punk, based upon class politics:

It’s funny how hardcore is supposed to be kinda revolutionary you know, but in a lot of ways it works against the people it’s supposed to support. [...] We used it

for music, for freedom, to do what we wanted, but I couldn't believe it, they come down here into this poor neighbourhood and they wreck these people's Teen Post [youth centre] they just fixed up?" (Watt, quoted in Irwin 2005).

The title and cover art of The Minutemen's seminal double-album, *Double Nickels on the Dime*, also questions the real impact of apparently rebellious gestures. In contrast to a contemporary pop-rock hit, "I Can't Drive 55" by Sammy Hagar, in which the protagonist displays rebellion through a refusal to adhere to the national speed limit, The Minutemen's album cover shows them sticking to the limit ("double nickels" — five five) precisely ("on the dime"). Their version of punk suggests that certain *signs* of resistance are in fact insignificant, and that compliance can lead to more substantial forms of resistance. Frugality and stability allows for the continuation of what they see as their *real* resistance — DIY cultural production.

Ian MacKaye's initial conception of straight edge (abstaining from alcohol, drugs and, in some definitions, from sex as a "pursuit"), first expounded in his lyrics in 1981, was similarly intended to subvert accepted notions of what it meant to be punk. For MacKaye, the temporary escapism offered by drugs and drink was a poor substitute for maintaining control and responsibility for one's own actions. Again, the awareness of the derailing of the hippie counterculture led to a vigilance against lapsing into stylistic performances of rebellion, against self-interested "dropping out", and focussing on using one's resources to resist effectively. Like Watt, MacKaye believed that to be the focus point of a media-instigated moral panic was essentially a temporary and surface-level disruption, and instead concentrated on staying out of trouble: "We were painfully honest — we didn't shoplift, we didn't vandalize, we didn't spray-paint. We were just good kids" (Azerrad, p.124). Being a "nice", hard-working punk constituted a double refusal, refusing societal norms, and refusing to perform to a mainstream conception of punk behaviour.

Several of the key figures in hardcore and post-hardcore came from military families, many participants were self-confessed "nerds" who had a thorough understand of music technology, and traits of rigour and attention-to-detail were highly valued. This is summarised by Faris (2004), writing on Steve Albini, as a "workingman persona", which draws on American ideas of honesty and hard graft, reinforced by the everyman

dress code of flannel shirt and jeans. Tim Yohannon, founder of *Maximum Rock'n'Roll*, claims that zines are “a way to show other kids that it is possible to be creative, to learn responsibility and decision-making, to find the value of work without the pay incentive – that all benefit one’s self as well as the larger body of humanity” (Sprouse 1990, p.47). The link between creativity and “the value of work” and “responsibility” made here encapsulates the stable, workmanlike approach emphasised by post-hardcore icons like Ian MacKaye and Steve Albini. Zines do not constitute an “opting-out” of work, or even a leisure activity, but a superior type of work. On a similar theme, Albini proudly identifies several indie labels as being among the most reliable and long-standing even in comparison to majors, countering any assumption that DIY necessarily means fragility, and industry means stability (Sinker 2001, p.141). Mike Watt talks about making an extravagant display of setting up one’s own gear, “especially if you were playing with a mersh [commercial] band that had a crew and stuff. Then we’d *really* put it on” (Azerrad 2001, p.74). The point is to demonstrate the validity of their approach through achieving a high-quality outcome — to show an ethos of personal responsibility and artistic integrity was not only an *alternative* to a system of contractual obligation and financial incentives, but that it might actually work *better*.

The constructive, “workingman” version of punk seems to have won out against the more destructive tendencies, at least in the historical retelling — the letters pages of zines throughout the eighties suggest it was an ongoing and unresolved dispute. However, in the indie scene of 1983-88 it is possible to trace the emergence of another DIY ethic, which adopts the values of refusal just as keenly as the “workingman” punk adopted values of resourcefulness. This “slacker” culture, associated with Generation X (generally defined as those born between 1961-81), slightly younger than those who had founded the hardcore and post-hardcore scene, and whose baby boomer parents had, in the words of Sonic Youth’s Kim Gordon, “created a world they couldn’t afford to live in” (Azerrad 2001, p.370). This change in predominant approach reflects many changes — the 1991 Sebadoh song “Gimme Indie Rock” makes a connection between the slacker ethos, drugs, and a shift in genre boundaries: “Started back in eighty-three, started seeing things differently, hardcore wasn’t doing it for me no more, started smoking pot, I thought things sounded better slow.” Indie increasingly appealed to a middle-class college audience rather than working-class punks, and musically constituted a move from the futurism of post-punk to the romantic, nostalgic sound of

indie. The slacker ethos finds authenticity in lack of ambition, taking the eventual presumed co-option of all alternative culture as a reason to be less passionate about its defence. Bands like The Replacements, who had never been interested in (or capable of) maintaining tight control of their band finances, tended to involve managers at an earlier stage, and their lack of interest in the extra-musical organisation of DIY so valued by MacKaye and Albini meant that they were less averse to major labels, and less precious about maintaining DIY as a bastion of an alternative model of professionalism.

3.6 Case study 3: Riot grrrl (1989-96)

Riot grrrl was a movement, indeed a self-defined “revolution”, that began in Washington D.C. in 1990, with a small group of young women keen to reshape an alternative music scene in which they were marginalised and oppressed. In their records, shows, and especially through zines, riot grrrls attempted to open up new opportunities for women and girls to express themselves and to communicate with each other, calling for a “revolution girl-style now”. Riot grrrl became globally popular, and particularly in the UK, with local autonomous “chapters” forming worldwide in order to co-ordinate local action. Their loud, fast punk music and confrontational performance style resulted in mainstream media coverage that emphasised their take-no-prisoners hostility, but alongside this anger was an emphasis on community-building (“girl-love”) and tolerance towards difference. As well as being a specific way of doing music, it was also a specific way of theorising and practicing (third wave) feminism.

My analysis here focuses on the period from 1989-1996, which is also the period covered by the Fales Riot Grrrl Archive at New York University. This period covers the initial meetings in Olympia, the seminal “Girls Night” at the International Pop Underground festival in 1991, the Bikini Kill and Huggy Bear UK tour in 1993, an increase in mainstream media coverage which was then met with a media blackout by several key figures, and the closure in 1996 of the last remaining riot grrrl “chapters” in New York and Washington D.C. It does not cover what followed on from this period, such as the emergence of a nascent online riot grrrl culture, and the significant impact of

“Ladyfest”, a loosely affiliated set of festivals which took place globally around the turn of the millennium.

Production and consumption

An early riot grrrl flyer, written by Kathleen Hanna in 1990, consists of thirteen instructions on how to bring about “the revolution”; the most oblique of these, halfway-down the page, is the three-word instruction to “resist psychic death” (Hanna in Darms et al 2013, p.18) The phrase is also used as the title of an early Bikini Kill song, which protests against “silence inside of me”, and counters this fear with the assertion that “I will resist with every inch and every breath” (Bikini Kill 1994 [1992]). The phrase “psychic death” summarises the danger of consumption, and specifically of consuming mainstream media. Production, in response to this threat of existential silence, gives an opportunity for women to have their own voice, and determine their own identity, in a culture in which they are often silenced or have their identity determined for them by others. However, issues of commodification and psychic death are complex, and the production of records and zines within riot grrrl still have to deal with issues of commodification, from the perspective of the consumers of their mediated texts.

One key way in which riot grrrl attempted to highlight their difference and separate their own media from commodified mainstream culture was through positioning girl-to-girl communication as revolutionary praxis, and by using language that highlighted the dramatic dimension, or the “event-ness” of this process. Riot grrrl zines and records are full of slogans, manifestos, and calls-to-arms which emphasise the need for immediate action, creating an aesthetic of total urgency:

BECAUSE every time we pick up a pen, or an instrument, or get
anything done, we are creating the revolution. We ARE the revolution.

(Reinstein, quoted in Dunn & Farnsworth 2012; p.141)

This spectacular rhetoric was shaped in part by the contemporaneous, D.C.-based, post-hardcore band The Nation of Ulysses, whose discourse both on record and in print was a blend of Cold War-era “Red Scare” paranoia, high camp, and fifties rock’n’roll slang. The overall effect is of far-left counterculture over-egged to the point of absurdity (their

1991 debut album was entitled *13-Point Program To Destroy America*), but also demonstrates the capacity of such language to develop resistance not in terms of a widespread social movement, or even any demonstrable political action, but within the individual imagination. Their devout belief in the political power of pop music was at once both slyly postmodern and anachronistically over-sincere, blending Gen X media-cynicism and youthful sincerity in a combination that made it difficult to pin down or deconstruct. Kathleen Hanna summarises their impact on her as “life-changing” (Bell 2011). The Nation of Ulysses’ lead singer Ian Svenonius described their first album as “like a zip-gun” (i.e. an improvised, makeshift weapon), drawing on the language of D.I.Y. and self-sufficiency to highlight the ability of mediated communication to act as a potentially lethal weapon when placed in the hands and ears of listeners (Dundas 1993). Riot grrrl made frequent use of this bombastic style, as in their calls for “revolution girl style now” (Bikini Kill 1991), creating a discourse that is at once ironically postmodern and deadly serious; a revolution that is both real and imagined, and which takes place through positioning consumption as a kind of psychological participation and consciousness-raising.

Sowards and Renegar (2004) argue that Riot Grrl drew upon consciousness-raising techniques developed by second-wave feminists a generation previously — sharing experiences in order to “eliminate self-blame” — but rather than doing this face-to-face in small groups, it used the zine network in order to create a mediated consciousness-raising, where the exchange of written materials acted as an equivalent opportunity to share, learn, and strategize. Here, consumption (of zines and records) is an active and reflexive process that provides opportunities for self-realisation. The bombastic style of riot grrrl literature is intended, in part, to defeat the stupefying effect of commoditisation, in order to open up these opportunities for consciousness-raising. Garrison writes that riot grrrls were fully aware that “media spectacles [...] offer[ed] new opportunities for the creation of oppositional consciousness” (Garrison 2000, p.147).

As Nguyen notes, another way in which commodification was resisted was through displays of emotional intimacy and authenticity. The highly personal nature of riot grrrl zines is related to the aim of consciousness-raising, and the idea that “from inside the oppressed classes themselves come political knowledges based on experience, which

might then be translated into expertise” (2012, p.179). As much as mainstream media texts are an inspiration for the form of these zines, there is also an attempt to bypass their status as mass communication. In this way, the “perzines” (personal zines) that were a key feature of riot grrrl make very few concessions to echoing traditional magazine content and style (i.e. contents, consistent type-setting, a consistent journalistic tone), and in fact are often closer to private forms of communication such as letters, or even diaries, attempting to create a mode of communication that is both one-to-one and one-to-many. This belief that this emotional authenticity could lead to something that is both mediated and unmediated is typified by zine-maker Nomy Lamm’s assertion that “I’m creating this kind of media that’s literally from my most sacred place to somebody else’s most sacred place” (quoted in Nguyen 2012, p.177). Authenticity becomes linked to resistance and vice versa, in a manner similar to Barry Shank’s study of the local music scene in Austin, Texas, in which “sincerity becomes a value that can only be signified through an evident resistance of the disciplinary constraints of the dominant culture” (Shank 1994). Authenticity is the characteristic which guarantees the efficacy of this communication, and therefore its revolutionary qualities.

Gottlieb and Wald write that “Riot Grrrl mobilizes xerox machines, 7-inch vinyl records and cassettes in the service of self-representation, a project inherently threatened by others’ representations of them” (1994, p.172). This threat of misrepresentation was realised around 1993, as mainstream press coverage of riot grrrl grew significantly, resulting in a spate of articles that often contained inaccuracies, cynicism, and in general was seen as trivialising riot grrrl’s aims and activities (Dunn & Farnsworth 2012). Following this flurry of coverage, several prominent riot grrrl figures called for a media blackout (Zobl 2004; Jacques 2001). The Riot Grrrl Press — a not-for-profit zine distributor based in Washington D.C. — was founded in 1993 in part as a response to the mis-representation of riot grrrl in the mainstream media. One of the reasons given for its foundation was the need for “self-representation”, in order to combat media coverage that “distorted our views of each other and created hostility, tension, and jealousy in a movement supposedly about girl support and girl love” (quoted in Dunn & Farnsworth 2012). Erika Reinstein, writing in their zine *Fantastic Fanzine #3*, summarises the situation:

What we are doing is sincere and real. We are not trying to be trendy or the next big thing like we're some kind of pop band. We are a group of girls who get together for support and to network because we need each other in this society that wants to act like we don't exist. For any reporter to try and package and market that is fucking obscene. I mean it is not necessarily bad for "the movement" cause other girls are finding out about it and they might get inspired to do something of their own, it's just that these big companies are profiting from riot grrrl. They're taking it out of our hands and turning it into a commodity to be sold. (Reinstien, quoted in Dunn & Farnsworth 2012, p.147)

The image of "our hands" here is not just metaphorical — Nguyen writes of one zine-maker touching every page of every copy of a 200-page zine with their own hand as a means of guaranteeing an authentic communication with one's reader (2012, p.176). But the quote above also acknowledges that mainstream media might offer greater exposure. Here, the communication is succeeding on one side (girls consuming the media and "finding out"), but failing deeply on the other (producers' work being commodified against their will).

Through a combination of spectacular rhetoric and emotional authenticity, riot grrrl suggested that consumption, when done right, could constitute a participatory act of resistance — resisting psychic death through consciousness-raising. It also emphasised the importance of controlling production and distribution, not primarily for economic reasons, but in order to ensure representational accuracy. It briefly found itself being commodified and misrepresented, and responded by doubling down on efforts to secure its own channels of distribution, thereby ensuring greater control over the way it was consumed.

Community and the individual

One of Bikini Kill's mantras compels girls to "struggle against the J-word [jealousy], killer of girl love", as part of a critique that identifies the individualistic pressures of the free market, as well as patriarchal tactics that seek to set women into competition against one another (quoted in White 1992). Riot grrrl made considerable effort to deconstruct a pop hierarchy of "star" artist and passive audience, and in the live setting bands would frequently offer the microphone to audience members in order to share

information about upcoming shows and meetings, and to share experiences of sexism and abuse (Schilt 2003a).

Hanna claims that “with this whole Riot Grrrl thing, we are not trying to make money or get famous; we’re trying to do something important, to network with grrrls all over, to make changes in our lives and the lives of other grrrls.” Arguably this dedication to creating a “an underground with no Mecca” (White 1992) conversely allowed bands like Bikini Kill, Bratmobile, and Heavens to Betsy to occupy a central position within the scene, with their commitment to sharing their platform allowing them to occupy a position as trusted representatives in whom other girls could place confidence. This allowed for a strong emotional connection between band and audience, positioning individual self-expression as a collective experience, as Allison Wolfe from Bratmobile recalls: “it was so powerful, I just remember crying when they [Heavens to Betsy] played, I was so happy that this was happening” (Koch 2006).

Lisa Darms argues that riot grrrl “sought to unify girls [...] while also recognizing and accepting individual girls’ differences” (Darms et al 2013, p.3) A piece in *Riot Girl #4* similarly states that “we riot grrrls are not aligning ourselves with any one position or consensus, because in all likelihood we don’t agree” (Darms et al 2013, p.45); *Bikini Kill #2* zine calls to “embrace subjectivity as the only reality there is” (Darms et al 2013, pp.123-47) Riot grrrls were often remarkably loose in terms of the control they maintained over ownership of names and concepts — the final issue of the Riot Grrrl zine informally passes on the mantle by declaring “those of us who have been working on these past four issues might not do them again, but this name is not copyrighted.... so take the ball and run with it!” (Darms et al 2013, p.46) Zine distros were not prescriptive in terms of the stock they carried, and were highly encouraging to newcomers, emphasising individual self-actualisation through cultural production as something that benefitted the community as a whole. However, this acceptance of different perspectives is different to making specific concessions for marginalised voices, and riot grrrl has been thoroughly critiqued for its limitations in this regard (e.g. in *Gunk #4*, reproduced in Darms et al, p.158). Nguyen highlights the way in which race was treated as a “disruption (bringing bad feelings)”, and how a scene based on knowledge through experience (e.g. of oppression under patriarchy) could only seek to

understand race in those experiential terms — as the desire of white practitioners to “know race better” (2012).

Insularity and openness

Riot grrrl was formed from within a scene in which women were often present, but frequently undervalued and disrespected — referred to as “coathangers” by the men who would leave their jackets with them whilst they entered the pit, leaving the women “literally marginalised” around the edge of the room (Koch 2006). Initially, the challenge for riot grrrl was to carve out a space for women within this hardcore punk and alternative rock scene where ideas of authentic self-expression were often closely tied to aggressive male physicality, and where the scene’s leading lights were predominantly male and often disinterested in gender equality — Thurston Moore coined the belittling, if ironic, term “foxcore” to describe early riot grrrl (Gottlieb & Wald 1994, p.254); visitors to Ian Mackaye’s Dischord offices were apparently greeted by a “no girls allowed” sign hung on the door (Stuart & Small 1982).

Therefore, riot grrrl was initially required to make changes within its own scene, rather than outside. Julia Downes describes riot grrrl as where “young women attempted to disrupt the spatial and sonic norms of the indie gig to incite feminist community and provoke change in their subcultural situations” (2012, p.205). A 1992 article in the LA Times argued that “Bikini Kill’s show is not just a vague, fuck-society punk diatribe but a focused critique of the punk scene itself” (White 1992). Riot grrrls identify punks as potential allies who share in some sense an outsider status, but who also reflect patriarchal structures that prevent girls’ self-actualisation.

FUCK THE FLIPSIDE FANZINE GUY [...] I don’t wanna hate the kids which is just to say what to do what to do? about NONREVOLUTIONARIES misrepresenting the underground to hundreds of potential cool kids, we’re just gonna have to fight, well alright!!! um...it’s just unforgivable really, right in the middle of so many punk rock dreams come true.

(*Bikini Kill #2*, reproduced in, Darms et al 2013, p.123)

There is some evidence that riot grrrls were changing the mindset of this existing crowd — Selene Vigil from 7 Year Bitch argues that in playing to male audiences, “we’re

helping open minds” (Gottlieb & Wald 1994) — but they also took steps to construct their own scene from within. They sought to reorganise spatial dynamics of the live show by distributing flyers encouraging “girls to the front” (Downes 2012, p.225), and imposing restrictions on attendance designed to filter out those who would be less amenable to these new dynamics — “men can come but they’ll have to wear dresses” (White 1992). Additionally, the limited distribution of zines, often hand-posted by the author, meant that riot grrrls were able to “control their audience” (Schilt 2003b, p.79)

This kind of control over one’s audience was important in a culture that often required some degree of privacy, or some ability to be “privately public” (Darms, in Darms et al 2013, p.3), in order to maintain a space for communication. Openness carries the danger of being misread by an audience that is on a different wave-length in terms of expectations and norms. For example, the reclamation of derogatory slurs against women requires some understanding on the part of the audience that this is taking place; Dave Laing notes how subversions of erotic performance in punk “may simply miss [the] mark and be read by the omnivorous male gaze as the ‘real thing’” (1985, p.117). White writes on the “girl revolution” needing to take place outside of “the public world, the world of men” (1992), and in an interview one school-age riot grrrl highlights the difficulty of communicating with other (non-Riot) girls in her class, who are not “ready” to comprehend riot grrrl culture and its associated expectation of solidarity and community:

They’re not necessarily predisposed to listen to what’s going on. I don’t know whether they’d even have a common ground to stand on. I could say something, but how would I know that they wouldn’t take the other side and attack me instead of support me? (Rosenberg & Garofalo 1998, p.821)

What is demonstrated here is a keen awareness of the difficulties of operating outside the borders of the scene, and the need to create a context in which riot grrrls could support each other in self-actualization without interference. This was done both through zine distribution networks, and through filtering the audience of live shows, in order to create a space where the presence of outsiders was minimised. When riot grrrl is accused of elitism and insularity, it is important to understand how this made certain types of resistance possible, whilst also acknowledging that their requirement of “collegiate erudition” (Gottlieb & Wald 1994, p.271) may have excluded many from

participation. One riot grrrl, when considering why boys dislike the sound of aggressive female vocals in music, argues that “you've got to be smart enough to understand that people are turning off because they're denying a reality” (Rosenberg & Garofalo 1998, p.833). Riot grrrl is positioned here as requiring a certain type or level of consciousness; the “reality” contained within the scene is not immediately accessible to all.

On the other hand, for some practitioners, resistance occurred in those moments of friction in which they came face-to-face with those who were either opposed to or nonplussed by them. Liz Naylor, who booked and managed the 1993 Bikini Kill and Huggy Bear UK tour, argued that these clashes constituted the place where ideologies might meet and interact, describing an audience of “pissed up lads [...] and then sort of a riot breaks out and I kind of liked those moments in a way because I think they're more challenging [...] I quite liked some of that confrontation”. Julia Downes summarises Naylor as seeing “physical fallout [...] as evidence of the authentic challenge riot grrrl represented to the social order in enabling punk-feminism to confront the ‘wrong’ audiences and places” (Downes 2012, p.230).

Resourcefulness and refusal

The framing of riot grrrl as a means of giving voice meant there was a political value ascribed to action and production of any kind, encouraging others to be loud, to take up space, and to communicate. The call-to-arms in *Bikini Kill #2* suggests a near-uncontrollable refusal of hesitation: “the undeniable genius of this generation has surfaced and it's all about ACTION, no time to decide what's right what's right what's right what's right” (Darms et al 2013, p.123). Gottlieb and Wald find evidence of this within riot grrrl music, arguing for a reading of riot grrrls' screams as a rejection of the societal demand that “women remain patient” (1994, p.170). Riot grrrls consistently encouraged each other to produce, “to take the initiative to create art and knowledge, to change their cultural and political landscape, rather than waiting for someone else to do it for them” (Garrison 2000, p.154). The rhetoric of sharing also encouraged the extension of distribution networks through informal duplication: “Hey, there's also a sale on at Kinko's now, so if you know anyone who would want one of these [the zine], it would only cost €6 to copy it for them” (*Riot Girl #1*, 1991, reproduced in Darms et al 2013, p.31).

Some critics of riot grrrl felt that they could detect an aesthetics of refusal within the music itself. Reynolds and Press call riot grrrl “a kind of musical anorexia, a deliberate arresting of development in order to preserve innocence and stave off the professionalism that’s associated with the corrupt music biz” (1995, p.329). The comparison to an eating disorder is offensively wide of the mark as a descriptor of a music that is full of creativity and musical innovation, but there is something to be said about riot grrrl’s conscious playfulness and unpredictability. The aim of riot grrrl is not to “preserve innocence”, as its practitioners are coming from a place of experience and worldliness, but to promote a “grrrl”-ness that reclaims “the naughty, confident and curious ten-year-olds we were before society made it clear it was time to stop being loud and playing with boys and concentrate on learning ‘to girl’” (Gilbert & Kyle, 1996, quoted in Garrison 2000, p.141). Riot grrrl musicians’ approaches to performance also worked against music industry standards of consistency and standardisation, for example the Californian group Emily’s Sassy Lime, who state that “every show sounded different” because they didn’t own their equipment, so would borrow whatever was available (Experience Music Project 2011). In creating something that is unstable by design, riot grrrl practitioners sought to resist the stasis of commodification and the dangers of predictability. This does not constitute a refusal in terms of non-participation or an “arresting of development”, but a resourceful attempt to create new norms of performance and cultural production.

3.7 Conclusion

In organising these three case studies of historical DIY scenes in relation to the same four key tensions, I have shown that their navigation of these tensions feed into very different constructions of authenticity: post-punk’s championing of the new and the difficult; U.S. hardcore’s valorisation of “workingman” frugality; and riot grrrl’s celebration of hand-made, epistolary intimacy. These are different kinds of cultural resistance, interpreting the call to “do-it-yourself” in different ways, whilst utilising broadly the same base materials of guitars, records, tapes, and zines.

These differences might be usefully understood as collective responses to broadly shared sociohistorical experiences: respectively, the experimental atmosphere of U.K. art schools; the anger and frustration of disaffected U.S. military kids; and the sisterly environs of U.S. liberal arts colleges. But it is also important to understand these different forms of resistance as resulting from these scenes' very different aims, which saw them positioned "against" different institutions and norms — the purported vacuity of popular music; the neoliberal policies of Reagan and Thatcher; aggressive macho norms within the punk scene. Responses to these key tensions, then, are not just the result of historical circumstance, but of practitioners' attempts to engage with and affect change upon the situation at hand.

I have demonstrated that these three scenes each maintained a "tense" relationship with popular music, echoing many of its forms and customs whilst also seeking to counter, adjust, or dismantle certain aspects of its character. I have also pointed towards the ways in which these forms of resistance were co-opted by the established music industries: post-punk established its own star system, as "indie" became a genre rather than a set of organisational practices; post-hardcore inspired and in some sense "trained" the eventual superstars of grunge and "alternative rock"; riot grrrl's positive feminist message fed into the Spice Girls' declaration of "girl power" (Jacques 2001; Schilt 2003a). Each of these scenes culminated in the creation of a substantial new market for music consumption, with detrimental effects on the resistance of the scene upon which this market was established. I have shown that DIY requires critical reflexivity to remain one step ahead of those who would see its unique attributes as "saleable" and as divorceable from their communities.

In the following four chapters of fieldwork analysis I address these same four key tensions — one per chapter — in an attempt to identify the kinds of cultural resistance offered by DIY music today. What are the aims and aspirations of DIY music practitioners, and how does this manifest in their practice? To what extent is critical reflexivity possible? How might the scene's aims be undermined and waylaid? The specific focus is on social media, since my hypothesis is that the potential "undermining" of DIY's present-day cultural resistance is most likely to come from this direction.

Chapter 4: Production and Consumption

4.1 Introduction

One of the key propositions of DIY music in its past incarnations has been that to make culture is to have access to certain transformative powers that are inaccessible through merely consuming culture. The notion of DIY music “taking back” control over production carried a critique of the cultural industries, and their role in sustaining cultural and political hegemony. As I have identified across three historical case studies, this manifests in a tension between production and consumption, as practitioners emphasise the value of production as empowering and resistant, whilst nonetheless creating products intended for consumption. The task therefore is to create systems of exchange that are detrimental neither to producers or consumers, and also to create products that reconfigure the producer-consumer relationship. However, in recent years the rise of the “prosumer” has suggested that this relationship is already being reconfigured. The amateur producer — recast as prosumer (Ritzer & Jurgenson 2010b), or co-creator (Banks & Deuze 2009) — is no longer an antagonist to the established cultural industries, but is a fundamental part of the online economy. Additionally, consumption has increasingly been posited as the site of making and contesting cultural meaning (Jenkins 1992), with potential consequence for the political status of production and the value placed on DIY music as a form of cultural resistance.

This chapter assesses whether DIY practitioners find new potential for positive experiences of production and consumption in this environment. I also consider the extent to which practitioners have adapted to the normalisation of “prosumption” by differentiating themselves from it, in order to retain the sense of DIY music as constituting radical political practice. I begin in section 4.2 by considering the relationship between production and empowerment, and its relative benefits for DIY practitioners in relation to consumption. I then move on to consider issues relating to commodification, although I argue that this is better seen within a wider, holistic framework of *authenticity*. I divide this into two modes, looking first at “intimate authenticity” in section 4.3, and secondly at “economic authenticity” in section 4.4. In section 4.5 I consider the “everyday” social media experiences of DIY practitioners, and

consider how their consumer experiences on these platforms might impact on the political status of their productive DIY activity. I conclude by suggesting that new compulsions to create “content” on the social web might threaten the autonomy that has historically been associated with cultural production.

4.2 Production and empowerment in the “prosumer” age

Although production and consumption would appear to be two sides of the same coin, with each instance of one creating an instance of the other, the anthropologist Daniel Miller has identified a long-standing (i.e. pre-industrial) ideological tendency to view production as the “creative [...] manufacture of value”, and consumption as “the using up of resources and their elimination from the world”. Consumption has, across a wide array of societies, cultures, and religions, been denigrated as the wasteful antithesis to production, as vulgar and excessive, or, in a moral framework Miller links back to Eastern religions, as “the wasting away of the essence of humanity in mere materialism”. “This makes it quite unsurprising”, he continues, “that the earliest discussions about consumption which were written prior to the rise of capitalism look remarkably similar to contemporary discussions” (Miller 2001, pp.2-6).

It is important to note, then, that the moral dimensions of production and consumption are not inherently tied to capitalism. What is more specific to the industrial capitalism of the past two centuries is the notion of *cultural* consumption as a means by which the “masses” are manipulated, and potentially exploited, through power dynamics which pit the global corporation against the fragile psyche of the individual. The connotations of passivity and wastefulness remain, but in the writings of mid-century critics of the “culture industry” (Horkheimer & Adorno 2002 [1944]; Marcuse 1991 [1964]; Packard 1957) this wastefulness takes the form of misdirected human potential, as vast swathes of society are diverted towards a consumerist false consciousness.

DIY music’s valuation of production stems to some extent from an adoption of this critique, and particularly Adorno’s critique of standardisation in pop music and its psychological impact on listeners (Adorno 2002b [1938], pp.302-311). However, this leads to a tendency to read DIY activity as anti-capitalist (or at least aspiring to be)

which, whilst not always incorrect, tends to bypass the longer cultural history of production and consumption highlighted by Miller. It also fails to capture the rather more varied politics of DIY practitioners — my participants were not all anti-capitalist, and often emphasised dimensions of their productivity that were more concerned with self-realisation than resistance. Therefore, in this section my aim is to offer a consideration of DIY production and consumption *without* the Frankfurt School, and without the “culture industry” critique, in order to pay overdue attention to production’s deep-rooted connotations of creativity and empowerment (Sennett 2009). (These are still political issues of course, and it is hard to talk meaningfully about empowerment without considering broader power relations that might help or hinder this. In sections 4.3 and 4.4 I attempt to integrate some of these notions with DIY’s more explicitly Adornian approach to commodification.)

The activity of the Leeds DIY music practitioners in my research takes place within a context in which the social web has purportedly brought about a golden age of opportunity for cultural production, in terms of the increased accessibility afforded by online platforms, creative software, and increasingly-pervasive hardware. Dave Laing’s analysis of 1970s punk saw that movement as a potential “harbinger” of a future in which DIY culture was the norm (1985, p.78) — a future that has been realised to some extent, certainly in the most optimistic readings of Web 2.0 (e.g. Bruns 2008).

Part of the supposed democratising quality of online prosumption stems from the internet’s apparently infinite capacity to host content, meaning that distributors (e.g. platforms like YouTube, Soundcloud, and Amazon) no longer need to reject products on the basis of insufficient space. The concept of the “long tail” (Anderson 2006) is based on the assumption that infinite “shelf space” in online distribution means that everyone gets an equal chance to display their wares. Processes of digitisation over the last twenty years have led DIY in this direction; music and “posters” often only exist as digital files on social media, a greater number of social interactions are “virtual”. However, I found that my practitioners still placed a significant value on tangibility, and they closely associated production with materiality and physical effort. Similar to the punk practitioner in Ryan Moore’s 2007 anthropological study, who sees making a record as “leaving behind human history”, and having “made something out of nothing” (quoted in Moore 2007, p.448), the physical artefact is seen as fundamental to making

an “impact”, however small. One practitioner argued that part of the value of running a DIY label was in “committing to physically document a piece of art, [in order to] guarantee that it’ll have its say in the records of history” (P1).¹ Whilst this physical activity often happens in conjunction with online activity (e.g. a small-run of cassette tapes would be sold online, with a digital download, through Bandcamp), it is worth noting that this perspective is rather dismissive of the ease of distribution offered by the online circulation of immaterial labour.

In the making of these physical objects — primarily zines, records, tapes, and posters or flyers — there was an emphasis placed on being involved in the process from start to finish. One reason for this physical involvement in all stages of the creative process is to ensure that things are done “just right”. One practitioner recalled a lengthy production process, involving a number of physical interventions, in order to achieve a desired visual effect on a record sleeve:

...and to do this it meant we had to order from three different suppliers, they were all shipped to my house, and I had 1000 LPs at one point in my front room, split down into two different stickers, an insert, a download code and the records themselves. We put them all together one night, then we sent them to the factory to be shrink wrapped, and then we put the stickers on. (P18)

Ryan Moore argues that this in this kind of holistic DIY production, part of the function is to display, in Bourdieu’s terms, “autonomous” rather than “heteronomous” intentions — i.e. following the art’s internal logic rather than that of the market (Moore 2007, p.440). But it also suggests that an investment of time and physical effort creates a deep connection to one’s output.

And in many instances this physical activity cannot really be described as “craft” — which, in Richard Sennett’s terms, is about the intimate relationship between the brain and the hand, and the resultant capacity for skilfulness (2009). The process of duplicating fifty cassettes by hand, one-by-one, offers no great artistic challenge, no real skill level, and no opportunity to impart an individual style. This is not a display of craft skills, but a *performance* of menial labour — a “deindustrialisation” of the highly

¹ Participants are identified by number (e.g. P1, P2, etc) in order to preserve anonymity — see Chapter 1.3 for more on ethics of this research.

industrial process of record packaging, dismantling the factory line and reassembling it in microcosm in one's bedroom. It is valued as proof of activity, and as an embodiment of "do it yourself" ethics.

The "war stories" of DIY music practitioners often recount physically laborious tasks, emphasising the strong link between manual labour and the "work" of DIY:

The first gigs I put on, the first was at Common Place, which is now Wharf Chambers, and I remember it almost put me off for life, cos back then you had to obviously organise everything anyway, but you had to bring the bar down yourself from upstairs, and you had to set the bar up and sell your own cans over the bar for like 50p, like Strongbow and stuff. Then you had to get the PA down yourself and get your own sound person, so it was like the most DIY DIY DIY you could get basically, and I was like 'wow, that's a lot of work'. (P19)

The amount of manual labour involved in this kind of DIY promotion, which also involves the physical work of printing posters, and visiting other venues and shows to hand out flyers, is arguably less fundamental to achieving a successful show now that Facebook events are ubiquitous, and automate the process of sharing and inviting to the point of being virtually effortless. Nonetheless some practitioners found a specific kind of value in the "manual" approach that was not contained in the process of promoting on Facebook:

I like to think that hopefully nowadays I don't rely on Facebook completely, where I think some DIY promoters might? Which is obviously fine, but it's sort of, the ethic of DIY is you're doing it yourself, you're not just sat on your arse at home online, so I think as a DIY promoter you should probably... it's the effort you put in, and it's like a thing that you should try and live, you shouldn't be flippant about it, basically. Where if you're just using Facebook as a tool and not anything else, you're obviously not that bothered, if that makes sense? (P19)

And similarly, from another participant:

I feel like some people don't even [submit gig details to local music magazines] anymore, they just use Facebook. And it's like, that's the minimum you could do really, if you're putting a gig on, you know? I feel like a gig is a bit of work... putting on a gig is hard work and promoting it is hard work, but that's what makes it good. (P12)

The argument made by these two practitioners is that the process of putting on a show *ought* to involve effort, and that the social media platforms that have automated various aspects of this process have in some way devalued the work. It also suggests that there is a correlation of work with time at a deep level — the work is measured by the time put in, rather than the end result; the gig *is* the time put into it. It is perhaps noticeable that the practitioners who decried the Facebook-online method of gig promoting tended to have a long history of involvement with DIY which predated social media activity as a promotion strategy. For them, online activity is a “short cut” (and therefore invalid), but to others feels more like the default method, and still constitutes an empowering form of production.

Paul Théberge’s *Any Sound You Can Imagine* argues that the influx of more affordably priced music technology in the early 1980s led to “a new kind of consumer practice” taking form “at the very heart of music production” (1997, p.243). He argues that musicians came to rely on these manufacturers for new sounds, which becomes “the basis for an entire set of dependencies” (ibid., p.243), and then concludes that any new technology of this kind “incorporates the same ambiguities of empowerment and dependency” (p.254). The same ambiguities are reflected in the way that social media has simplified much of DIY practice, but the relationship between production, empowerment (or dependency), and technology is highly subjective, and is influenced by the way in which technology is seen to interfere with existing work practices. Just as Théberge’s electronic music, with all its presets and automation, would be seen by some as too easy to constitute “real” music-making, the automated online version of gig promotion was seen by older practitioners to be too easy to count as “real” DIY.

Another key aspect of production is in its ability to access skills, experiences, and emotional states that are seen as less accessible to consumers. In DIY music this is often expressed as kind of demystification — countering the common assumption of the non-musician that music is for the talented or the confident (“oh, I could never play in a band!”) by getting involved in production and learning skills, or learning that the skills are unnecessary. Robert Stebbins’ research on amateurs in various cultural and non-cultural fields found that one of the key functions of amateurs was in holding professionals to account, by acting as highly-informed observers and arbiters within that

world (1992). Similarly, experiences as producers of musical culture mean that DIY practitioners are well placed to offer moral judgement about non-DIY local music activity:

If [a gig] is in a shit pub and it's like £15 I'd probably question why that was that expensive, cos I know the costs of putting a gig on — that means someone's making some money somewhere along the line, and it's probably not the band. (P12)

This kind of demystification is especially important when musical knowledge is often retained within particular groups, and skills are shared within spaces that are formally or informally exclusive to members of this group — e.g. men only talking to one another about music technology (Abtan 2016). One participant who founded a group to share skills for women in electronic music highlighted this benefit of DIY production in countering this exclusivity:

It was basically a skill-sharing website for other women who were having difficulty getting those skillsets because it was... like you walk into a guitar shop and they'd be all a bunch of riffing "bros" and you'd be like "actually I just wanted to know, how do I not get too much gain?" And they'd be like "whatever", and you'd be like "this is an okay question!" Like now we could Google it, but back then really you just had to ask someone or look in the library, or hope that someone made a zine or something. (P28)

This practitioners' DIY activity was able to help redress this gendered distribution of knowledge, using the internet to widen the impact of this practice.

For the DIY practitioners I interviewed, another important aspect of production is the capacity for self-realisation. Making culture (particularly music, but also zines and other forms) is seen as "transformative", in terms of developing one's confidence and capabilities, and living a rich and rewarding inner life. This is a quality that is attributed to arts participation in general, beyond the borders of DIY (Matarasso 1997), but it is specifically valued in DIY, where the quality of the end product is considered less important than the processes and social relations that go into it:

I think the whole good/bad musician thing has been something which used to hold me back, but now it doesn't ... now I am concerned with just making things,

and the process of making stuff yourself as this really important transformative process. (P21)

This idea of production as a positive experience of self-realisation also points towards the specific kinds of consumption offered by DIY. This same practitioner was able to take great enjoyment from consuming other people's productive activity, again with little regard to the aesthetic characteristics ("I really like it when friends form bands and they've never played in a band before [...] it's always great, because [they're] an awesome person and [they're] making music and [...] getting involved in more things!" (P21)). A high proportion of the DIY scene are practitioners (i.e. not many audience members aren't also in bands), and so experiences of consumption in DIY might often involve these feelings of empathy and collegiality — recognising the evidence of "transformation", and with a high-degree of knowledge about the demystified production process, consumption is perhaps less distant from production than in other circumstances, and might carry that potential for empowerment.

Being able to look back and reflect on personal growth is also a key feature of DIY activity. One practitioner described the process of playing their first ever show, and travelling through various emotional states in the lead-up to it:

We've psyched each other up, basically, to do something, and that's how [the band] formed. We're all just really anxious people so it's quite... not nice, but comforting to know that we're all in the same position, none of us are uber confident. [...] The first show was terrifying. I thought I was gonna be sick the whole time. In the day [before the show] I turned into a different person, I was really snappy and weird and I didn't know why I felt so strange, but it turned out I was just really anxious, cos once we played I felt this weird relief that I'd never felt before and I was like 'that's nerves', I didn't know I could ever feel that nervous about something, basically. It was terrifying but it was good cos we played in a little tiny room and there were quite a lot of our friends there, maybe twenty, so it was fine, everyone was really supportive, and I was like 'ok, maybe I can do this'. (P19)

A supportive, non-competitive environment, which many practitioners identified as a key feature of DIY, is here crucial to the process of self-realisation that takes place before, during, and after this first live performance. The prevalence of friends in the audience also suggests that the experience of "consuming" this performance in this way

would have involved a close connection — through their proximity to the emotional state of the performer friend, they may have been able to experience something “transformative” themselves.

Many recent readings of cultural consumption have emphasised its role in affirming the self through style (e.g. Hodkinson 2002), and even as participating in the meaning-making of culture, especially online (Jenkins 2006). Consumption is seen as means by which products are rescued, comprising “the labour by which we appropriate goods and prise them out of the anonymous and oppressive conditions under which they are manufactured and exchanged [...] to become the negation of capitalism rather than merely its end point” (Miller 2001, p.7). DIY continues to offer evidence of what Miller calls “a deep division between our sense of production as constructive and consumption as destructive” (p.12). Forms of DIY production are distinguished from online prosumer activity and from everyday consumption, and considered as especially empowering, because of the emphasis on physical effort and materiality, the ability to create knowledge and assist demystification, and DIY’s special link to transformation and self-realisation.

4.3 Producing authenticity I: Intimacy

In the first section of this chapter I considered the potential for self-realisation within production and consumption, without detailing the relationship to commodification which is central to the politics of DIY music. In this section I consider that specific aspect of modern production and consumption — the commodity form — and attempt to position it with a wider conception of DIY ethics. In this first section I outline the relationship between commodification and production, and argue that authenticity is a more appropriate lens through which to understand DIY practitioners’ strategies to resist commodification. I then focus on two modes of DIY authenticity which work to counter its effects; the production of intimacy, and (in the following section) the production of alternative economies.

Commodification is of fundamental importance to considering the political status of DIY music, and has been at the centre of many of its critiques of the music industry. But

the term has also been misused and overstretched in its application to DIY practice. In this section I outline a Marxist understanding of commodification. I then consider the extent to which this Marxist conception is useful in analysing DIY music's approach to production, through reference to existing literature, and argue that we need an understanding of the related concepts of standardisation, mediation, commercialisation, and reification, and that these, along with commodification, might be considered more effectively within the concept of *authenticity*. I then identify three modes of authenticity that each seek to resist negative connotations of commodification, and consider social media's role in maintaining these authenticities.

In the first chapter of *Capital*, Marx lays out a seemingly straightforward definition of the commodity. An object is considered a commodity when its use-value (the purpose it is specifically for, e.g. a chair's primary use-value is for sitting on) is subjugated by its exchange-value. In order for a product to be sold on the market, this process of establishing its exchangeability is a necessary conceptual step. However, the process of commodification is rather more discreet. Marx understands this as a form of alienation resulting not from the single commodity's entry into the market, but from the general tendency to consider objects (and also, eventually, people) primarily on the basis of their economic value — i.e. their exchangeability (Marx 1976 [1867], pp.48–49). Their specific attributes are disregarded, except to the extent to which they add surplus-value. Capitalists, as the owners of the means of production, do not value their products for their use value, but because they can be exchanged for profit (i.e. if a capitalist produces ten thousand chairs, it is not because they need to sit on all of them). In this way workers are alienated from the products they create, which do not belong to them and are valued only as commodities (ibid., pp.403–413).

Commodification in the cultural industries is seen as specifically detrimental because of art's special relationship to self-expression and originality, which appears to run counter to notions of exchangeability and commercialisation. Hence the music industries have often sought to provide a working environment for musicians in which they are often granted relatively high levels of autonomy (Stahl 2013, pp.1–2), with managers acting as a buffer between the “capricious creative” and “corporate accumulation imperatives” (Banks 2007, p.9). DIY practitioners have historically argued that this distance is insufficient to prevent commodification impinging on musicians' creativity, and also

that this distance is frequently breached, as non-musicians seek to meddle in search of profit.

However, I want to argue here that whilst commodification is of critical importance to DIY music, considering it at the expense of a more holistic view of DIY ethics might inhibit a rich understanding of DIY music activity. Stacy Thompson's *Punk Productions* (2004) dedicates two chapters to considering punks' approaches to resisting and countering commodification (primarily anarcho-punk collectives such as Crass and Crimethinc). For Thompson, "punks have always mounted economic and aesthetic forms of resistance to capitalism and the commodity as its most ubiquitous form" (p.4). I propose that considering these issues in terms of "the punk/commodity opposition" (ibid., p.81) is an unhelpful dichotomy for a number of reasons. Firstly, the commodity form of recorded music has proven itself to carry huge cultural and political potential, and that aspect of its exchangeability clearly holds an appeal for DIY practitioners which they are reluctant to lose. If practitioners were concerned about commodification *above all else*, there are participatory forms of music on offer that would seem to be less threatened by commodification. Their belief in recorded music's ability both to change the world is clearly tied up with its status as a commodity. Secondly, DIY (and punk) practitioners are not of one mind, politically or culturally, and do not necessarily identify their practice as anti-capitalist, even when they resist many of the capitalist norms of the cultural industries. It is helpful to use Marxist analyses of commodification in order to consider its effects, but it is less helpful to read DIY activity as Marxist praxis, when it is often nothing of the sort. It also leads to a kind of special pleading on Thompson's part — record collections are fetishistic except when owned by a punk modelled on Benjamin's "true collector", who can re-individualise through their ability to recount a "life history"; Crass' musical output was anti-commodification because it rejected radio-friendly song structures, but the same is not said of the avant-garde music (e.g. progressive rock, early electronic music) being made at the same time in other realms.

It is important to recognise that DIY music practitioners are unlikely to talk and think in terms of commodification, even when their subject matter directly concerns the use- and exchange-values of music. My participants were more likely to consider these issues along the lines of good/bad, real/fake, interesting/boring, or fair/unfair. What's more,

the evidence of these traits is often found not through economic analyses, but through aesthetic and ethical judgements, primarily expressed in the distinguishing of good and bad music — i.e. whether or not the music *sounds* exchangeable. The ethical and the aesthetic are often inseparable. When considering the negative impact of the music industry, one practitioner used a musical metaphor to consider the link between commodification and aesthetics, which neatly demonstrates the way in which these issues are intertwined:

It's always I suppose been that idea that it takes away a lot of time and resource and focus on the music itself. It throws the music into a churning organism that doesn't really care about the music and it's all about what the music can do for whatever it happens to be serving. It's one of the reasons why I don't particularly like guitar solos, because far too often I think the song is there to serve the guitar solo, or the solo is there to serve 'look what I can do as a musician', rather than it being about the service of the song, I suppose. And I see the industry in the same way, that if it's not serving the song, it's a difficult thing to want to engage with in a positive psychological and emotional way.
(P22)

I therefore argue that the lens of authenticity is a more appropriate means by which to consider these issues, whilst acknowledging that *commodification is of particular centrality to the authenticity framework valorised within DIY*. Through this approach it is possible to see how DIY authenticity often overlaps with frameworks of authenticity in rock music (a genre not usually overconcerned with commodification), and also where it differs. It is also possible to consider DIY in terms of the “vague opposition” which Thornton considers to be a component of “subcultural capital”, which may have as much to do with rejecting “parent culture” or asserting “hipness” as it does issues of commodification (2005 [1995], p.184).

It would be difficult to outline a single model of DIY authenticity in the scene in which I conducted my fieldwork, as individuals have different approaches to issues of genre, locality, aesthetic, and politics. However, I suggest the following broad dualities as indicative of the position of a majority of my practitioners (although it is possible that none of them would agree with the entirety of this list):

Inauthentic/commodified	Authentic/uncommodified
Cynical (made for money/recognition)	Genuine (made for one's self/community)
Sold to make a profit	Free, or sold to recoup costs
Clean, 'expensive' sound	Lo-fi recording
Mass-produced (industrial)	Handmade/bespoke (artisanal)
Mediated communication	Direct communication
Demonstrating barriers to entry	Demonstrating ease of participation
Populist (broad, sentimental topics)	Self-expressive (specific)
Efficient (labour of economy)	Inefficient (labour of love)
Broad engagement (big audience)	Deep engagement (the <i>right</i> audience)

It is easy to see how commodification might relate to many of these issues. But there are also concerns related to mediation (distance between producer and consumer), commercialisation and marketing, democratisation, and the aspects of self-realisation discussed earlier in the chapter.

In the rest of this section, and the following section, I focus on two strategies of DIY authenticity that relate to commodification and its resistance. The first is intimate authenticity, which concerns DIY's ability to demonstrate a close connection between producers and consumers. The second is economic authenticity, which emphasises a lack of interest in market values and profit-seeking. These strategies are also both impacted by changes brought about by Web 2.0 and social media, and so I pay attention to this context in considering their application.

As identified in Chapter 2, riot grrrl practitioners used handwritten and "cut and paste" zines, lo-fi recordings, and an epistolary style of communication to create a sense of emotional intimacy between themselves and their audience (Nguyen 2012). As well as attempting to create a more direct communication, it was also intended to demonstrate that production of this kind was achievable for anyone, by containing visible or audible evidence of the making process. This kind of authenticity relies on the increased intimacy between producer and consumer, and relates to commodification insofar as it

presents a product that is not alienated from its producer, and seeks to take its consumers out of a state of passivity and towards active production.

There is still an understanding that displaying intimate production has a role to play in contemporary DIY. As considered in the previous section, a physical connection to the work is emphasised; one practitioner recalls that “we made the CD sleeves ourselves, got them done in cardboard, [...] cut them with a craft knife, stuck them with PVA glue sort of thing” (P16). Another participant described their DIY activities of zine-making and also making music in these terms:

I want it to kind of look like anyone could do it, to encourage other people to do it. And similarly, when I play in bands I'm not a very competent musician, but I still think the music I make is worthwhile, and that people will enjoy seeing it. And I think that's, I guess that's part of DIY for me, that I don't feel like I have to reach a certain level of proficiency before I'm allowed to share my art with other people. I can just do it when I want to. (P9)

The valuing of participation and communication over “competence” and “proficiency” here works to make DIY accessible to unskilled would-be producers, in contrast to a market in which proficiency is required for efficiency, and in order to maintain a separation between legitimate production and its consumers. Walter Benjamin highlights the Soviet Russian socialist press as the kind of cultural form that induces others to produce, as it “forces us to re-examine the separation between author and reader”, creating a space in which the reader is “always ready to become a writer” (1970). It is this kind of benefit that practitioners see in attempting to create intimate culture.

This kind of DIY aesthetic is still attempting to demystify the production process, although arguably in retaining a “handmade” aesthetic it is also adhering to an established “style” of DIY culture that doesn't relate to the recent technological developments that have made cultural production more accessible. Physical cutting and pasting, and photocopying, whilst convenient and cheap for punks and riot grrrls, is no longer a strategy that adheres to the “it was easy, it was cheap” philosophy of DIY. But as previously established, there are reasons that DIY practitioners are reluctant to divest from physical making.

Social media platforms offer an easy way to distribute and present DIY activity. However, the capacity to display a “handmade” aspect in this context is reduced due to the limitations of the templates provided. For example, Facebook Pages look identical to one another, with the exception of cover photos and profile photos. One practitioner reflected on the benefits of the social web’s ability to provide a professional-looking presentation for their skill-sharing group:

You know... taking it from riot grrrl and something now, it's actually got more reach [on social media], we reach more age groups than we would the old school way, [there's a specific] kind of person who would pick up a hand drawn zine, whereas someone is more likely to come across a Facebook Page and message. Because this idea of what professionalism is supposed to look like goes away on Facebook, almost? Cos it's just text on the screen, not handwritten text. Which in my handwriting would not be so good. So, we get like producer-y high level people, and then we get the nine year old who's like 'my dad and I came across your page', that kind of thing. It is kind of weird, cos it loses personality right, we all are the same, whereas I could change the way it looks on the [written] page but [online] it's like we all have a profile pictures and a cover photo and we all have these timelines. Because we're all the same. Like, if we all are nothing except for like... we're 'fill-in-the-blank' people, your name and your photo, then it's kind of egalitarian, no-one can actually be bigger than anyone else, no one can have a Facebook Page that has more data than the other, we're all allotted this same space, and we all can use it just as much as the other. (P28)

This suggests that the imposed design of Facebook Pages (and other social media “templates”) might offer both democratisation *and* homogenisation; in removing the distinctive (sub)cultural capital imbued by a handmade aesthetic, DIY culture is made accessible to a wider set of people, allowing its values and politics to travel further.

Another key facet of the intimate authenticity valued by riot grrrls was in the way it allowed practitioners to communicate without mediation — zines had no editors, and unlike the glossy girls’ magazines of the time, had no corporate owners or advertising partners to answer to, and therefore could speak honestly and openly about political and personal issues.

Since that time, the rise of social media has normalised the authentic reproduction of the intimate self (Marwick & boyd 2010). The work of producing intimacy is performed everyday by millions, and the term “platform” suggests this kind of elevation of communication to the status of broadcasting (Gillespie 2010). Whilst arguably this carries the potential to empower “prosumers” in the same way that DIY has done for its practitioners, it also suggests that intimate self-expression through media is no longer the sole preserve of DIY culture. It equally means that DIY is no longer considered to be more intimate than mainstream pop and rock music — Twitter especially is considered to offer a novel degree of “behind the scenes” access to the lives of pop stars and other famous figures. The kind of intimacy that may have been a special feature of DIY is now a fundamental aspect of celebrity culture (Marwick & boyd 2011, pp.147–149), and is valued for being relatively unmediated and free of corporate interest — just as DIY has been.

One practitioner argued that their independent status meant they had more freedom to speak out on social media, therefore maintaining a distinctly DIY authenticity: “I like the fact that we can just freely retweet a political post without a label coming and saying, ‘you can’t do that, it will affect your sales’” (P16). However, this kind of label intervention or censorship would be unlikely — labels *want* intimate, self-expressive social media content from their rosters, and are happy to permit controversial content (up to a point) in exchange for social media’s capacity to generate news coverage. In fact, DIY practitioners are, if anything, playing catch-up with celebrities (and often with the rest of the public) when it comes to displaying this kind of intimacy. Intimate authenticity has become a prevalent feature within popular culture, a trend that has been echoed in the growth of reality television, reflecting a strong desire to get in behind media artifice in order to know what people are *really* feeling. And just as reality television emerged as a low-cost model of cultural production (Hearn 2017a), expressions of authenticity come at a bargain price for platforms. On social media in particular, the kind of intimacy valued in previous DIY scenes seems to have become almost compulsory across the board.

Several participants were convinced that they didn’t have the right kind of personality to enjoy Twitter, or to be successful on it. They didn’t feel comfortable with that kind of expression or, often, weren’t sure how to translate their authentic feelings into enjoyable

or relatable content. One said they didn't use Twitter because "I don't have that ironic persona that far-left Twitter has, that everyone seems to go crazy for" (P17); another assured me that they were "absolutely crap at Twitter — don't ever look at my Twitter" (P19). To be successful on social media (and therefore popular in musical terms) requires aspects of the self to be made readily available, potentially to an uncomfortable degree:

P15: *You have to be really ready to make a fool of yourself a lot of the time.*

Interviewer: What do you mean?

P15: *Just to be silly. To be a character. I think I take myself a lot too seriously a lot of the time, and I think that hinders a lot of people wanting to listen to your music.*

Interviewer: But... you are who you are?

P15: *Yeah, but I think everyone's kind of goofy, and it's just how much are you willing to show that, I guess.*

Displays of the unguarded self are required to demonstrate intimacy, however forced that might be, and being "willing to show" that intimate self has significant social benefits. Bucher has interpreted social media participation as an inversion of Foucault's panopticon, in which visibility is scarce rather than ubiquitous, and the threat comes not from being constantly watched, but "by the constant possibility of disappearing and becoming obsolete" (2012, p.1164). Even without corporate owners, DIY practitioners feel restricted *because* of the intimate affordances of the platform, developed in tandem with the usage conventions within their social group, and therefore compelled to be intimate in order to remain visible. Communication remains in this sense highly mediated, and gauging the success or failure of one's intimate authenticity is based on the ability to perceive one's self from outside. The performance of intimacy on social media requires, ironically, a critical distance from subjectivity.

4.4 Producing authenticity II: Alternative economies

When I asked participants to define what was distinctive about the DIY music scene, the most common response concerned its status as an alternative economy — emphasising the elements of non-profit practice. One participant suggested that much of the confusion around DIY nomenclature might be avoided if we were to “call it NFP [not-for-profit], not DIY” (P13). Not-for-profit practice seeks to avoid commodification by demonstrating that labour is not coerced or prompted by a need to subsist, and therefore music can be made without concern over its exchange value. A key motivation for this is that it demonstrates that the artistic production has not been unduly influenced by economic motives, from either internal or external sources. As well as this, profit is seen as a cause of audiences being exploited or excluded:

I guess cos if it is a [for-]profit thing then...if someone's profiting from it, then someone might be losing out as well. Say, if it was like a big promoter thing, who were doing it to make money, then the gig itself might be overpriced, and so people might not be able to afford to come, cos if they want to make money, then they need to price the gig enough to pay the bands and to make money, and then people might lose out that can't afford to go to the gig. (P7)

DIY label operators and promoters have a particularly ambiguous relationship to commodification, as they hold alternate versions of roles that were formed within the music industry, and which therefore symbolise that “industry” aspect to a greater extent than musical roles of writing and performance, which have a far longer (i.e. pre-capitalist) history. For example, marketing, a concept that would be considered anathema to many DIY bands, is an integral part of the label or promoter role, even in DIY. Keeping one's activity not-for-profit is one way of doing this, as it demonstrates labour performed for the love, or for the benefit of the music, but promotional work still seems to carry this danger of forgetting one's real purpose (i.e. supporting the music), especially when time and money have been invested. Paying for advertising (i.e. sponsored posts on Facebook) was seen as example of this dangerous territory, as one label owner noted: “you have to be careful about that sort of thing because you cross the line from this being something that you want to be heard, to it becoming a commodity that you're starting to hawk” (P25).

Live music, as a product less easily exchangeable and reproducible than recorded music, has often been seen as the space in which DIY music is furthest from issues of

commodification. However, one of the ways in which music has been seen as commodified is through venue owners seeming only to value the economic exchange-value of music — part of the straight-edge politics so prominent in 1980s US hardcore was an attempt to reject the cynical use of live music solely as a means to sell alcohol. DIY music practitioners value venues that seem to be *about* the music, and that operate closer to their ideals of community, which includes being non-profit:

Well I guess with Wharf [Chambers] it's non-profit so there's that aspect of it. And the Brudenell [Social Club], even though it's not the same, it's not massively expensive — they could make more money than they are if they put the drinks prices up and got [more expensive catering]. It's like keeping things honest and authentic, I feel like people in those two venues value that. (P4)

Brudenell Social Club is valued not for being anti-capitalist (which it isn't), but for being less capitalist than it could be. Even as the venue has gained popularity amongst a broader student and local populace, the owner-operator of the Brudenell continues to set aside time and space for DIY shows to happen on especially favourable terms. He “knows it [i.e. DIY] is important so that's why he still tries to have some of that stuff happen”, reflected one participant (P9). This “importance” might be seen as having both economic and cultural aspects, in terms of positioning the Brudenell as an ethical alternative to the plethora of over-commercialised bars in Leeds.

DIY is by no means the only field of music to operate on non-profit basis, and in many respect is comparable to the activity of amateurs across various genres and music communities (Finnegan 1988). More broadly, Andrew Ross argues that underpayment (for musical work, amongst other things) is “the natural outcome of a training in the habit of embracing non-monetary rewards — mental or creative gratification — as compensation for work” (2000). What helps to make DIY practitioners' approaches distinct is that they link their economic approach to a political critique, positioning the lack of profit as deliberate, rather than unfortunate. This is achieved in part by taking a sacrificial attitude not just towards money, but to other forms of capital — the widespread reluctance to make a profit from music also extends to cover a broader sense of “profiting” beyond economic gain:

So to me, it's DIY, you know, I'm not just doing it because I want credit or I want whatever, status or anything, it's cos the gigs I put on are just cos I want to

give bands an opportunity to play in Leeds, if they can't or if they're struggling.
(P19)

One participant similarly argued that a key part of DIY practice is “not doing it so that you become ‘the dude’ or whatever, [...] not doing it for kudos and your own elevation” (P12). Aware that these non-monetary forms of capital, similar to Thornton’s notion of “subcultural capital” (2005 [1995]), might in itself offer temptations that distract from serving the music, some practitioners are keen to demonstrate their distance from this kind of scene credibility. As Thornton notes, this kind of capital can be converted into economic capital through paid work in the cultural industries, and this does occur within DIY, as musicians, producers, writers and others begin to convert and capitalise upon a strong reputation. Making this transition from non-profit hobby to viable career is not always frowned upon (see the following chapter for more on this), but for some who operate by a strict not-for-profit framework, setting that strict ethical boundary upon their own practice puts clear water between themselves and any temptation to cash in.

The internet has often been posited as having the potential to provide radical economic change. Arvidsson’s concept of an online “ethical economy” sees great potential in the capacity of social networks’ affective connections to outgrow and replace a capitalist, financial economy, as ethical behaviour is recognised and rewarded to the extent that reputation becomes a more valuable currency than money (2009). This is of course based on accruing the kind of social and cultural capital that the DIY practitioners are aiming to shun, but nonetheless perhaps offers a means by which to escape some of the pitfalls of commodification. However, activity on the current (and likely future) dominant social media platforms fails to reach this potential for two reasons. Firstly, Arvidsson’s ethical economy relies on a certain transparency between ethical reputation and the public measures of this ethical reputation, to the extent that money can no longer build, repair or conceal public reputation, and instead non-hierarchical affective relationships bring about a kind of collaborative justice. But presently, the links between reputation and capital are all too clear; money can generate Likes (through buying followers, or through more roundabout strategies of promotion), and Likes can generate money (directly as a social media “influencer”, or indirectly as a demonstration of earning potential). Secondly, current measures of reputation are still deeply rooted in exchangeability and the objectification of social relations, in the quantitative

measurements of likes, shares, and follows. Therefore, the affective dimensions of commodification are still present, even in spaces where this nascent alternative economy might be said to be in operation.

4.5 Everyday social media use and the DIY “audience commodity”

In the above section I have established three approaches by which DIY practitioners attempt to resist the commodification of their musical activity on social media and offline. However, being a social media user, even as a music practitioner, always involves more than this kind of content production. Time spent uploading music, or promoting a show, is insubstantial in comparison to the amount of time that practitioners scrolling passively through news feeds, disinterestedly clicking links, or on ambiguously “prosumption”-style activities such as sharing articles, commenting on friends’ posts and photos, and sending messages.

In this section I consider this ‘everyday’ social media activity of DIY music practitioners. This is the type of social media that is least specific to DIY music, hinging on personal profiles and intimate relations, rather than the more wide-ranging communications involved in DIY music, and which certainly is not imbued with the political meaning that my participants tended to attach to playing shows, making music, or the work of forming and building musical communities on- and off-line. Arguably, therefore, it falls out of the remit of my study, alongside all the other mundane and daily activities performed by DIY music practitioners when they are *not* being DIY music practitioners. However, I pay particular attention to this everyday activity here for two reasons. Firstly, my participants’ political perspectives on social media platforms are just as likely to be shaped by their everyday experience of ‘living’ with them as by their specifically musical online activity. Whatever approaches they take to the online production and distribution of their music-practice will be derived from these normal engagements — the usage patterns, frustrations, and tensions overlap. And secondly, social media has been considered as a place in which production and consumption are made increasingly indistinguishable, thanks in part to their ability to be equally “captured” by communicative capitalism (Dean 2010). If social media activity feels commodified at the level of the everyday, then DIY music production may carry less

power to propel its participants out of consumer culture, and may increasingly seem like one cultural option amongst many, a taste-culture that offers no real political critique of the media economy.

My participants are the kind of users that Van Dijck describes as “both content providers and data providers”, which is to say, they cannot escape through production from being profiled by platforms as a consumer, and having their data collected, utilised, and returned back to them as targeted advertising (Van Dijck 2009, p.47). All users, says Van Dijck, “whether active creators or passive spectators [...] form an attractive demographic to advertisers” (p.47). In short, they are, at least sometimes, an audience, and they are surveilled as such by platforms eager to pin down their taste-profile in order to improve advertising efficiency (Andrejevic 2007). Much of this everyday social media activity constitutes “doing” DIY music, to the extent that it is the work of maintaining and participating in the scene, but does not constitute production in the same sense as making and playing music does. Its potential commodification therefore requires consideration in a framework other than that of the commodification of music, which as shown above, is primarily concerned with the process by which music becomes available and exchangeable in the marketplace.

Dallas Smythe’s conception of the “audience commodity” (1977) has been a hugely influential approach to considering the consumers of media as “the principal product of the commercial mass media in monopoly capitalism” (Smythe 1981, p.26). Thoroughly critiqued and debated at the time (Murdock 1978; Smythe 1978; Livant 1978; Jhally 1982), this notion has been reconfigured in recent years to consider the ambiguous “work” of social media participation as a similarly exploitative process in which users (or, their time and attention) are the products sold by platforms to advertisers (Fuchs 2012; Lee 2011; Manzerolle 2010). Critics of the audience commodity argue that it constitutes the “social factory” thesis extended *ad absurdum*, to the point where all activity, whether paid work or leisure time, is considered equally-exploited labour (Caraway 2011). In the digital age, the debate continues as to whether social media activity constitutes “free labor” (Terranova 2000), or whether in characterising such activity as exploited work, we deny users’ subjectivity and potentially restrict our ability to meaningfully criticise *actual* exploitation of workers (Hesmondhalgh 2010).

These debates are ongoing, and remain pertinent to my own work and to the digital economy more generally. However, here I want to sidestep issues of what does or does not constitute unpaid work or exploitation, in favour of considering the psychological dimensions of commodification. The appropriate question to ask here is whether there is a general tendency for my participants to see their everyday social media activity in terms of its exchangeability (i.e. its surplus-value to platforms and advertisers), at the expense of seeing it as valuable for their own ends of self-realisation and sociality. An assessment of this kind would involve considering evidence of alienation, and reification (the objectification of social relations), as a means of measuring commodification of this activity. In doing this I will consider the potential for social media usage to relate to Marx's basic modes of alienation — estrangement from one's labour and the products produced, from one's self, from one's colleagues, and from one's "species-being" (the desire to produce in a manner beneficial to the entire species that, for Marx, was something uniquely human). I will also utilise Robert Blauner's four categories of alienation at work: powerlessness, meaninglessness, isolation, and self-estrangement (1964). Whilst Blauner was concerned primarily with industrial production, rather than the digital consumption that is my focus here, I think it is reasonable to suggest that my participants might identify feelings akin to some or all of these four states as a result of being subjected to audience commodification.

In the following section I consider my participants' attitudes and political perspectives towards being users (rather than *specifically* producers) on social media platforms, with particular attention paid to Facebook — the platform that still hosts the majority of their social media activity (and also their passivity). My purpose here is to gain a sense of whether the psychological dimensions of commodification are felt by my participants as a result of their 'everyday' social media usage. I then move on to consider the means by which practitioners attempt to resist or mitigate this kind of commodification, and evaluate their efficacy, before concluding with an attempt to consider how this might affect their approaches to DIY music practice.

DIY practitioners are largely aware that Facebook is interested primarily in capturing their data and selling that to advertisers, but are not able to express how that connects to or alters their approach to using the platform. For example, when asked how they felt about Facebook as a corporation, one participant offered the following:

We are the product, and they are selling us to companies as people to consume adverts. (P4)

It is hard to imagine a more concise summary of the audience commodity thesis. But the same participant continues:

I know it but I don't care enough cos it just literally like, without Facebook there's a lot of things I wouldn't know about. [...] I guess I'm willing to sell a little bit of myself to be able to use Facebook as a means to find out when gigs are. (P4)

A major benefit of using social media is the increased opportunity for participation and self-realisation. It is a far cry, then, from the kind of self-estrangement identified by Blauner, which occurs when work offers no opportunity for self-expression. Neither does it seem to alienate users from other users; indeed, an increased social connection is the *purpose* of the activity (although the quantified competitive aspects of these platforms have negative effects that are addressed elsewhere).

In terms of identifying their commodification as an audience, practitioners are limited by their subjectivity, which makes it difficult to see Facebook from a perspective other than how it feels to them to use it. But they are also limited by the amorphous nature of the platform, and by the difficulty of understanding how their social activity translates into a business model:

It's kind of difficult to think of it as a corporation because so many people are on it that it becomes sort of like... (P3)

The unfinished sentence here shows a struggle to find a word appropriate to describe the tangled web of sociality that constitutes our subjective understanding of Facebook as an entity, an understanding that I would suggest is best considered as reification. Facebook is such a powerful objectification of social relations that in some sense it *is* those relations, and equally, Facebook appears to be constituted of very little else beside them. There is a sense of Facebook being ubiquitous and omnipresent, as humorously identified by my participants in one interview:

P5: *I think in the early days of Facebook, Mark Zuckerberg said he wanted Facebook to be as common as turning on a light, and I guess it's become that.*

P4: *It's more common than turning on the light! You can go on your laptop in the dark.*

Autonomous Marxists have posited the “general intellect” as the great hope of an egalitarian technological future, as immaterial labour is collectivised and no longer works for capitalist ends (Virno 2007). Dyer-Witheford identifies that the internet offers enormous potential for reorganisation of work and society through the emancipation of this general intellect, even as capitalism makes great strides to bring it under its control (Dyer-Witheford 1999). On Facebook, it is precisely this general intellect that participants are estranged from — the weight of social relations, objectified in its representation *as* Facebook, appears immovable. One participant spoke of the difficulty in having a “political stance” on Facebook “when it’s so omnipresent with everyone you know that it’s impossible” (P3). The platforms’ power over the general intellect is such that one’s value (or labour power) is scarcely worth withdrawing.

For those that identified social media as an antagonist, one real challenge was in finding a way to think and talk appropriately about it:

It's hard to formulate an actual counter-stance without sounding like some tin foil hat wearing conspiracy theorist. But yeah, I am worried about my data, that self online being monetised, being abused, in a way. But, at the same time, I chose to enter the data and that's how the system propels itself. I mean to be honest it's not something I think about an awful lot, because you can't think it too much, you can't think about what being on the internet and doing work on the internet... you can't. (P17)

This suggests that it is in some sense unhealthy to think about counter-strategies to data capture. Such a perspective is not inappropriate, despite more than one participant identifying themselves as having a “paranoid” perspective on Facebook and data. One longitudinal study of Facebook users showed that even as concern over maintaining privacy grew, and users attempted to reduce the amount of personal information they shared, they were unable to prevent the increase in information they shared due to the inescapability of data-gathering “silent listeners” — Facebook, third-party apps, and advertisers (Stutzman et al. 2012). Marx sees alienation as a consequence of humans’

labour being redirected to ends beyond their control, as a result of the capitalist ownership of the means of production, and this is relevant here. Participants know that data is being produced and captured, but they aren't sure what, or when, or where it goes, and they aren't always sure why. It is important to understand that this takes places alongside and underneath the moral economies *within* Facebook that offer plenty of opportunities for self-expression and community-building (alongside the downsides of these activities discussed elsewhere). Returning to Blauner's categories of alienation, there is very little evidence of "self-estrangement", since they have plenty of capacity for self-expression in this activity, but they do have feelings of "meaninglessness" and "powerlessness" which exist alongside the meanings that they make for themselves.

Participants often rationalized or justified the economic position of Facebook through reference to the status quo, using the existing norms of capitalism to justify or explain their tolerance of the platform:

They're a business and we're using them. It's not like promotion for your art is a human right, is it, really? [...] The people that program Facebook are professionals with skills that have created this revolutionary tool and they should generate income. That's how capitalism works, and sadly we're all part of it, whether you like it or not. (P14)

There is a widespread view of Facebook as relatively fair *within a capitalist system*. Even with this feeling that Facebook probably *isn't great*, it is a struggle to identify the specific things that Facebook does wrong, or to find a reason to proclaim it as worse than any other big corporations.

In summary, my practitioners don't see themselves as in any way suffering at the hands of Facebook, or exploited by it, even when they are able to accurately identify the means by which the platform generates surplus-value through their activities. This is in part because alienation is experienced in tandem with (and often to a lesser extent than) empowerment. Certain types of alienation, such as self-estrangement, are notable by their absence — one of the fundamental differences between this activity and paid employment is the high level of control and self-expression. They rarely feel compelled to be active on Facebook, and even when they do, it is social relations, rather than Facebook as a corporation, that compels them. It would be inaccurate to consider them

“estranged” from their work in the sense that Marx and Blauner identify, because they have control over the content that they post. But they also know that something else is happening, even if they can’t say exactly what. The value of what Jurgenson and Rey call “ambient production” (cited in Rey 2012, p.410) — the quietly-captured data that, as my participant identifies, “propels” the system — is undoubtedly alienated from my participants, who semi-knowingly create it.

In Marx’s vivid and evocative descriptions of alienation, the products of labour return to loom large over their creators in hostile and unrecognisable forms, contributing directly to their exploitation through the capitalist appropriation of their surplus-value. The commodification of audiences on social media is a murkier process; it is the indistinct shadow cast by the brashly illuminated activity of social media participation. From this darkness comes the pervasive and nagging voice which murmurs to practitioners that their agency is undermined, even whilst the visible world of social media brightly affirms that it is not.

In the remainder of this section I consider the minimal means by which practitioners do attempt to resist their commodification as users of social media. Although I present them here in terms of resistance, it is also important to understand the extent to which these practices are considered to be personal preferences rather than political praxis, and also the extent to which these practitioners feel ambivalent towards Facebook, and are very willing to consider its positive effects. Even if they dislike aspects of Facebook, or distrust it, it is rarely considered to be their primary antagonist or opponent. The dynamic of corporate versus anti-corporate is acknowledged, but it is by no means the only dynamic in operation. Facebook is something that they work with begrudgingly, that they sometimes jostle up against uncomfortably, that sometimes is a valuable tool, that sometimes feels like home, and sometimes feels as though it isn’t there at all. Therefore, when considering the steps that DIY practitioners take to resist the commodification of themselves as consumers, it is important to understand these actions as a part of a wider range of practices, not all of which are performed in the name of resistance.

One straightforward way to avoid commodification via data capture is to opt-out, by leaving Facebook or, ideally, by not signing up in the first place. Casemajor et al have

considered the efficacy of digital non-participation as a means of empowerment and resistance, arguing that participation does not necessarily mean having power, and that some modes of non-participation “should not be understood merely as apathy or passivity but as something that can sprout from conscious collective and individual political choices” (2015, p.854). They identify “active” and “passive” forms of both participation and non-participation; leaving a platform for political reasons (and especially a collective “exodus”) is considered “active non-participation”, as opposed to the data capture and surveillance that constitutes “passive participation”. Whilst the emphasis on democratic participation and political presence is not a perfect fit for considering issues of alienation and self-estrangement, I draw on their categories here as means of considering the different kinds of social media (in)activity.

A collective “exodus” of social media wasn’t seen as feasible amongst my participants (although there was an interest in potentially amenable alternative platforms, such as the briefly touted “creators’ network” Ello), but individual non-participation through deleting or deactivating accounts, or through ceasing to post, was reasonably common. This was often considered as a practice undertaken for one’s sanity or well-being, rather than a political strategy, and any political aspects of it were often read with scepticism even by those undertaking them:

Interviewer: Why don’t you think it’s resistance?

P17: *Well I think it is resistance, but it’s a very mild form... I don’t want to overstate the implications of me deleting all my posts from Facebook and making my photos private. I really don’t know. But at the same time, I feel like it’s become such a part of everybody’s lives that when someone like [my friend] deletes his Facebook, everyone laughs, and thinks ‘oh you know, that’s such a pose’, it’s such a ‘look at me’ statement. I don’t know, it’s kind of complicated, but I’m not sure I’m being radical in any way, or even political.*

A postmodern cynicism of grand narratives extends to a scepticism of seemingly outmoded countercultural approaches, and non-participation in particular is too easily read as an expression of superiority, and a way to distinguish one’s self from the crowd. Deleting or deactivating social media also carries associations of poor mental health, and digital non-participation is considered to be a useful period of respite, necessary in order to “recharge one’s batteries” and return rejuvenated. Such a perspective reflects

the extent to which opting out of Facebook means opting out of social life — i.e. it must only be left temporarily.

Another common approach was a policy, however informal, of minimal use. This is summarised in the phrase “I don’t really use it, apart from...”, where usage is usually restricted to finding out about (and promoting) shows, asking for favours, or crowd-sourcing recommendations. This was not really identified as a strategy of resistance but participants did recognise that this made them at least a “non-ideal” user from Facebook’s perspective.

A more consciously resistant approach was to knowingly provide incorrect information on social media, especially pseudonyms and humorous job information:

I think a lot of people kind of implicitly reject this idea of themselves as a product on Facebook... I guess by the way they present themselves, people who won't have their actual name on Facebook. People having like comedy names and things, plays on their real name. (P5)

Casemajor et al categorise this kind of active non-participation as “obfuscation”, summarised as the “production of misleading information and feeding it into networks” (2015, p.861).

Just as the audience commodity is a means by which TV networks attempt to package viewers as a product in order to sell them by the unit, social media behavioural data is designed to demonstrate to advertisers that a platform’s knowledge of consumers is suitably accurate and worth paying for. Obfuscation threatens this accuracy, and therefore threatens the value of Facebook’s primary product. It also serves to ridicule, however faintly, the idea that the real self and the Facebook profile are one and the same, and the idea that capturing data is meaningfully equivalent to capturing the person generating it. There have been attempts to counter this obfuscation, most notably Facebook’s “real names” policy. This was met with widespread criticism, particularly from transgender users who no longer went by their birth name, who argued that this was a transphobic policy, and in some cases would compromise users’ safety (Holpuch 2015). Facebook’s retreat on this issue suggests that they are aware of the danger that countering obfuscation would also threaten the non-alienated aspects of self-expression

on the platform. For all its power, Facebook does rely on compliant, active users, and a degree of obfuscation may be a part of the price paid for this.

Another way in which participants understood themselves as resistant social media users was linked to their DIY music activity, but specifically the extent to which this activity made them “bad” consumers:

I think seeing as the majority of my Facebook likes are for DIY bands, I think Facebook probably finds it quite hard to market small bands with like several hundred likes... it probably finds it quite hard to make those sorts of adverts.
(P5)

DIY music here is seen as a sufficiently niche market, and Facebook’s algorithms often seem to lack the nuance required to infiltrate it. This was not a view held by all, as there was a concern that DIY bands were increasingly relying on Facebook advertising to generate an audience (discussed in Chapter 5.2). But there was a general sense that they felt a little too culturally and politically savvy to fall for the blunt instruments of Facebook marketing.

However, the main way in which practitioners saw themselves as resisting social media norms was not through any consumption strategy, but through the specifically political nature of their productive activity. This is broadly comparable to the “active participation” that Casemajor et al consider as “commoning” and “co-deliberation” — creating patterns of usage that might be democratic enough to counter the undemocratic platform. One practitioner remarked: “it’s ironic that something so corporate would be a platform for something so anti-corporate”. This connects the production discussed earlier in the chapter to the consumption discussed here — the former serves to nullify the latter. However, as I identified, there is widespread, low-level unease and insecurity about the extent to which they are commodified through data capture. The sense of DIY music as separate from systems of commodification, which may still be clearly distinguished in its production, is undermined by the commodification of the everyday activity within the scene.

4.6 Conclusion

DIY practitioners have historically constructed specific discourses of authenticity in order to demonstrate that DIY music creates especially close relationships between producers and consumers, and to suggest that it might even dissolve distinctions between these groups entirely. In this chapter I have investigated two of the main discourses employed — intimacy and alternative economies — and demonstrated the ways in which social media has altered their relationship to cultural resistance. Intimacy is no longer viable as a means of demonstrating a resistant form of anti-professionalism; it is a virtual requirement for success within popular music at any level. The construction of alternative economies remains a distinctive and important feature of DIY production, but this is threatened on social media by the close link between metrics and monetary value.

The other key finding of this chapter is that, whilst social media has brought about new opportunities for practitioners to produce (and consume) content, the forms of production that are most empowering remain tied to material and, importantly, *musical* processes rather than online activity. More unrewarding forms of production often involve feelings of compulsion and alienation. DIY has historically offered a critique of culture-as-consumerism which proffered cultural production as part of the solution; a source of autonomy and empowerment in opposition to the comparative restriction of consuming music commodities. What DIY hasn't yet developed is a critique of what I would tentatively label "producerism" — the notion that a compulsion to produce might be just as restrictive as a compulsion to consume. Consumption itself is not inherently pernicious (indeed it is necessary and unavoidable), but is made so by a capitalist ideology of consumption which overstates the correlation between the products we own (or would like to own) and the way we would wish our lives to be. Production can obfuscate and overstate in similar ways. The DIY rallying cry of "go and do it" (The Desperate Bicycles 1978) is an inducement to production that is no longer sage advice for those undertaking cultural resistance, when it is also the encouraging motto of social media platforms who benefit from this creating and sharing. There are good and bad kinds of production, which bring different kinds of reward, which involve different levels of compulsion and autonomy, and which offer very different capacities for cultural resistance.

Chapter 5: Insularity and Openness

5.1 Introduction

In Chapter 3.3 I outlined a framework for researching DIY music scenes' based on assessing their position in relation to four key tensions. In this chapter I consider the second of these tensions, *insularity and openness*, continuing the fieldwork analysis begun in the previous chapter to consider the culturally resistant qualities in contemporary DIY music, and the specific role of social media in shaping and mediating this activity.

The tension between insularity and openness is a consistent feature of DIY scenes, and responses have varied depending on specific goals and situations. Resistance might take place through the creation of a safe haven for political and aesthetic development, or through opening up the scene to confrontation and debate. Being too insular might lead to a limited capacity for change, as well as accusations of elitism and irrelevance. On the other hand, a DIY scene that is too open might be insufficiently resistant to mainstream culture, and therefore struggle to challenge existing cultural norms, or to generate its own forms of legitimacy within the scene.

In Chapter 1.4 I developed a definition of cultural resistance, adapting work by Stephen Duncombe (2002) and drawing on Nancy Fraser's identification of "maldistribution" and "misrecognition" (2000; 2003) — broadly correlating with economic and cultural oppression respectively — to understand the forces, structures, and organisations that DIY might try to resist. Insularity and openness might both offer capacity for resistance but, as with the other tensions I identify, they also point towards the inevitability of compromise — reflecting DIY's compromised position as both opponent and emulator of popular music (see section 3.3).

This is evidenced in the practices of historical DIY scenes discussed in chapter 2. Riot grrrls' initial dalliances with mass media (e.g. features in *New York Times* and "glossy" magazines) were an attempt to embrace openness in order to further their politics, but they found themselves, in Fraser's terms, "misrecognized" by the media in ways that

negatively impacted their attempt to progress gender equality in rock and punk. Therefore, a policy of refusing to engage with mass media was a form of resistance characterized by insularity, in which they prioritized affirmation and self-realisation within the scene. As in the U.S. post-hardcore indie scene, proximity to (and integration with) the popular music industries can bring about a change of mindset in practitioners, altering perspectives on success and negatively impacting the scene's ability to offer an alternative to major label economics (i.e. to resist Fraser's "maldistribution"). Insularity offers protection from this kind of assimilation, but also reduces the scope of what can be achieved: UK post-punk was routinely decried for its inability (especially in comparison to punk) to cause "disruptions" in wider society (e.g. Reynolds 1984); riot grrrl practitioners identified that launching an "authentic challenge" to society might depend on playing to at least partly-hostile crowds (Downes 2012, p.230).

In this chapter I describe and analyse contemporary DIY practitioners' attempts to engage with this tension, with specific emphasis on the role of social media. Firstly, I consider the use of social media metrics in contemporary DIY music, and the potential for these metrics to interfere with practitioners' perspectives on insularity and openness (section 5.2). I do this by considering the links between quantification and capitalism, and the potential for quantitative metrics on Facebook Pages to sustain an "enterprise discourse". I conclude that there is capacity for resistance in the way that practitioners apply their own understandings to these metrics, but that overall metrics have a negative impact on practitioners' ability to resist the commodification of their activity.

Secondly (in 5.3), I identify a discourse of "safety" in contemporary DIY, and address the consequences of this online and offline, exploring the connections between the emphasis on "safe space" policy and the growing concerns over social media's "filter bubble". I explore the consequences of a stable, insular scene in Leeds, and potential consequences for radical and transgressive aesthetics and performance. I conclude that certain kinds of safety are crucial in affirmation and self-realisation, particularly for marginalized people, but I also suggest that an aversion to difficult or unusual practice leads to experiences of mundanity (which has consequences for resistance), and missed opportunities for DIY to play a more transformative role in society.

In section 5.4 I present a short case study, recounting a Leeds DIY band having a fractious online encounter with representatives of a different music scene, considering the role that social media plays in shaping these kinds of interactions. I then conclude the chapter (5.5) by summarizing the position of contemporary DIY in relation to insularity and openness, and the resultant capacity for cultural resistance.

5.2 Imagining an audience: DIY and social media metrics

In this section I consider how DIY practitioners use social media metrics as a means to imagine and understand their audience. The connection to this chapter's wider theme of insularity and openness lies in the complex relationship between quantitative measurements and capitalism's compulsion towards growth, and platforms' use of these metrics to advance a discourse of "enterprise". Historically DIY scenes have valued a qualitative approach, as emphasized in the de-massification strategies of post punk, and the epistolary intimacy of riot grrrl (see Chapter 3), in contrast to the popular music industries' apparent quantitative focus on sales figures, demographics, and profits. The relative insularity of DIY scenes has been associated with the capacity to value quality over quantity, and to find specific meaning in music that is apparently lost when exchangeability is prioritised.

In what follows I argue that contemporary DIY practitioners increasingly rely on quantitative metrics in order to imagine their audience, in part because qualitative understandings of online audiences are difficult to reach. Looking specifically at their use of Facebook Pages, I argue that this leaves them vulnerable to feelings of alienation, and to internalizing the "enterprise discourse" of the platform. Practitioners do seek to resist this, and are able to successfully retain existing DIY moral frameworks and attach them to the metrics provided: reading quantitative measures through a qualitative lens. For the most part, though, I find that the usage of Facebook Pages' metrics tends to lead to negative experiences, and tends to reduce DIY practitioners' capacity for resistance.

The growth of social media has brought about the "datafication" of vast swathes of everyday interaction (Mayer-Schönberger & Cukier 2013, pp.73–97). Our actions are turned into numbers in three senses: firstly in their transformation into code, secondly in

their retention as “data” by platforms, and thirdly in their presentation back to us as metrics. This datafication is bringing about new ways of comprehending ourselves and the world around us, such as the rise of the “quantified self”, which makes use of the data points provided by new digital technologies to perform highly metric-based forms of self-evaluation (Ruckenstein & Pantzar 2017). The process of “making the web social”, argues José van Dijck, is also the process of “making sociality technical” (2013, p.12). Benjamin Grosser links the prevalence of numbers to a “business ontology” and “audit culture” on social media, reflecting on their capacity to provide comparative measurements, and their connection to capitalism’s “growth fetish” (drawing on Fisher 2009).

Quantification is entangled in important ways with processes of commodification and reification. Commodification relies on quantification as a means to create and understand exchange-value, converting the specific use-value into an abstract and countable form that can be bought and sold on the market. For Marx, this exchangeability has become the driving force for human activity under capitalism. Commodification serves to contort human agency by concealing that “capital is not a thing, but a social relation between persons” (Marx 1976 [1867], p.839), masking systematic exploitation of workers and also alienating them from the commodities they produce. Reification, the process of making abstract relations into a concrete “thing”, is also connected to quantification — measurements can be important in suggesting the tangibility of social relations. Not all quantities are commodities, and countability is not the same as exchangeability on the market, but quantitative measurements in general tend to render things comparable at the cost of a loss of detailed understanding of those things. For Horkheimer and Adorno, this propensity of quantification to flatten understanding was fundamental to what they saw as the “irrationality” of the Enlightenment project’s desire for rationality. They saw this epistemology of irrational *reduction* as abetting instrumental reason’s complicit relationship to power and domination (and ultimately to fascism), creating an approach in which: “anything which cannot be resolved into numbers, and ultimately one, is illusion; modern positivism consigns it to poetry” (2002 [1944], p.4). This also highlights the special potential for art to represent an understanding *beyond* numbers (albeit often from a position of irrelevancy) — Adorno recalls that when asked to “measure culture” he reflected that

“culture might be precisely that condition that excludes a mentality capable of measuring it” (2005 [1969], p.223).

Beyond quantification, there are other concerns about how the internet and social media allows us to “imagine” others. Marwick and boyd have written on the “context collapse” of social media (2010), drawing on the work of Goffman to consider how our “performance” of identity varies significantly in order to remain context-appropriate. They argue that social media “collapses” these separate contexts (i.e. our family, friends, colleagues, associates, and potentially strangers), creating one space in which we have to communicate a single message to multiple audiences. The result is an increased emphasis on the “imagined audience”, a means by which social media users attempt to avoid communication failure by imagining who *might* be on the receiving end. Litt and Hargittai found that social media users’ imagined audience included deceased relatives and non-human actors, “when they knew it was unlikely or in some cases impossible for such entities to see or respond to the post” (2016). Dean has argued that the absence of context online (specifically when blogging), and the resultant “fantasized audience”, has significant and detrimental effects on conceptions of subjectivity (2010, p.65). Whilst I am not really concerned here with how context collapse means practitioners have to “manage” multiple audiences, I am concerned with the way that social media’s specific communicative architecture might result in practitioners finding it difficult to attain a full and healthy conception of the self, and the subsequent implications for autonomy.

So, there are two ways in which social media might impact on conceptions of audience, which might be crudely summarized as the *ambiguity* of the qualitative, and the *ubiquity* of the quantitative. For the rest of this section, I use my fieldwork to present and analyse my participants’ perspectives on these issues, and then conclude by considering how their capacity for resistance is impacted (for better or worse) by their use of social media metrics.

For DIY music practitioners, the work of “imagining” an audience online is often difficult. At times, this means acknowledging that the digital traces left by audiences are open to multiple, contradictory readings, as in this consideration of Bandcamp download stats:

Our demo has had 21 downloads, 'cos I looked a couple of days ago. And it's like, who are those 21 people? I'd like to find out who has downloaded it, because I guess it's just 21 people I know. It might just have been [our drummer] 21 times. (P14)

This is in stark contrast with experiences of playing shows at local DIY venue Wharf Chambers which, as I discuss later (section 5.3), are highly predictable in terms of audience, and where the band might feasibly know every person in the room. This reflects the specific ability of the internet to promise the improbable through its networked capacity (“anyone could see it!”), whilst denying that possibility as a result of the *very same capacity* (“there’s too many people — what chance do I have?”). Laura Gurak identifies “speed” and “reach” as key features of internet communication that act as complementary “partners” (2001, p.30); Baym uses Gurak’s terms to distinguish that a key feature of social media is its ability to make digital texts travel far and wide and fast (2015, p.12). This is true insofar as they are *capable* of reaching a global audience within seconds, but in reality, particularly at this level of obscurity, in a type of scene characterized by close-knit networks (Taylor & Jones 2015), this kind of unpredicted travel seldom occurs. Belief in this kind of mythic internet, which is supported by the exceptions (i.e. the viral sensations) rather than the majority of unsensational content, only adds confusion, and obscures our understanding of how information flows through networks. The unknowable audience of the internet offers an updated version of the “talent scout in the crowd”, presenting the possibility of mysterious strangers in the dimly-lit audience, with the likelihood being that, should the lights go up, they will reveal the expected familiar faces.

In the context of this uncertainty, and the difficulty of accessing reliable qualitative information, numbers such as Likes on Facebook Pages become particularly useful in imagining an audience, carrying validity because they are long-standing, widely used, and publicly comparable (unlike, for e.g., Bandcamp download stats, bands can see *each other's* number of Page Likes). In the context of this chapter’s exploration of insularity and openness, I want to consider the effects of using quantifiable measurements as the key means of imagining an audience online, and how these metrics might affect ideas of aspiration and growth, focusing specifically on Facebook Pages.

Facebook Pages is a part of the Facebook platform intended to be used by organisations, businesses, causes, and other projects — it doesn't necessarily imply a collective responsibility, but does imply that it represents something other than just a person (i.e. it might be for an individual's activity as a comedian, or a tree surgeon, or even as a social media "brand"). It offers a public-facing page which is broadly similar to an individual user's Facebook profile in appearance and functionality, and similarly also offers a private messaging system, although this offers additional business-oriented features, such as auto-reply. Unlike the two-way "Friends" system of profiles, Pages' connection to users is measured in "Likes" — the amount of users who have, in effect, subscribed to receive content from this Page on their timeline (i.e. news feed). The "reach" of a Page is approximately determined by the number of Likes it has, plus any additional "shares" that content receives, which would bring it to the attention of the network of the sharer. Pages is free to use, but owners can pay to Boost their content, meaning it has a better chance of reaching their existing audience (i.e. those who currently Like the Page) and, in a more conventional form of advertising, they can also pay to have their content appear in the timelines of users who don't currently Like the Page. Whilst much early Facebook activity around brands and businesses took place in Facebook Groups, this has been phased out over the last few years; Pages offer a higher degree of official legitimacy (with a "blue tick" verification system, similar to Twitter), and primarily support one-to-many broadcasting (and exponential virality), rather than the peer-to-peer (and contained) communication of Groups.

All of my participants had some administrative control (as either sole or joint owner) over at least one Facebook Page, and virtually all of them were able to tell me the amount of Likes on their Page (and usually their amount of Twitter followers), with a margin of error of one or two Likes. Usually they had seen the numbers within the last couple of days, either because the number was in an attention-grabbing position on the site — "you see it every time" (P27) — or through receiving Facebook notifications encouraging the setting and hitting of targets: "I only know 'cos there was something on the page where it's like 'invite everyone, get to one hundred people!' a couple of weeks ago, just irking you to pay for an advert or something" (P14).

Facebook has put significant effort into establishing Page Likes (and the accompanying measure of "reach") as an important measurement of success. Facebook Page admins

regularly receive notifications “from” Facebook, beginning with the notification on a new Page that tells you to Like your own page, in order to make it look better to a visitor. The inference is to imagine one’s self as being observed, offering reflexivity in place of the absent audience, post-context collapse. Page admins receive notifications instructing them to set an initial “achievable goal” of 50 Likes. They receive regular reminders about approaching milestones (“You’re close to 100 Likes!”), although there seems to be no past-tense equivalent (i.e. “You’ve reached 100 Likes!”) — the affect inspired by forward-looking aspiration is perhaps more beneficial to the platform than celebratory stock-taking.

Administrators of Facebook Pages have access to a large amount of data on the performance of their Page, which are contained under the heading of “Insights”. Here Page owners can find data on the amount of user engagements (Likes, comments, shares) over specific periods of time (day, week, month, quarter, year), information on the demographics of users who have Liked the Page (gender, location, age), and also track the total amount of Likes for the Page over time. One feature of Insights offers a table with which to compare one’s own Page performance with that of several others. This table comes pre-loaded with suggested comparisons of who to compare with, which generally are Pages within a similar field, with a similar number of Likes. The points of comparison are quantitative — levels of post engagement (i.e. amount of Likes, Comments, Shares, and views), recent activity (i.e. posts and content uploaded by the Page owner), total number of Page Likes. On my own band’s Page, when I first came across this table it was pre-loaded with three bands, all of whom were personal friends or acquaintances. Facebook Pages had, I suppose, correctly identified us as operating in the same market — these bands are in some sense my closest competitors, even if I don’t see them that way — and therefore it would be hard to fault the algorithm, which is presumably based on our bands’ network proximity. Nonetheless to see them presented in this context was rather disarming. The algorithm isn’t wrong, and the data it uses isn’t incorrect, but the discourse is substantially at odds with DIY’s moral emphasis on non-competitive community building.

Features like this comparison table, as well as the aspirational, metrics-based notifications discussed above, suggest that the discourse of Facebook Pages highly values audience growth, both in terms of reach and level of engagement, and also uses

competition to incite Page activity. This is highly compatible with the “enterprise discourse” identified by Mark Banks as increasingly prevalent within cultural work (2007). Banks draws on work by Angela McRobbie to consider how practitioners’ understanding of cultural work as enterprise leads to individualisation and self-blaming (Banks 2010, p.42). On Facebook specifically, the importance of the entrepreneurial self is linked to the capacity of audience size to act as a measure of success — Likes are the quantification of some form of value, be that social, cultural, or aesthetic. Presented with an excess of quantitative data, and a lack of qualitative feedback (many of my participants complained about this), there is a temptation to rely on the numbers, and their growth, as the “reward” for creative (musical) work. In doing so, the audience is imagined only as its quantifiable aspects. I should stress that my argument is not that audience growth is necessarily *a bad thing*, but rather that an internalisation of enterprise discourse might result in seeing audience growth as the only (or primary) valuable measure of success, to the detriment of artistic quality, personal well-being, and the coherence of community in DIY music.

Nancy Baym argues that quantitative metrics fail to “see” or “capture” data in two significant ways (2013). The first problem is that metrics are inaccurate, sometimes deceptively so, in large part because they fail to filter out interactions from bots and other non-relevant actors (a failing reported widely in mainstream media, e.g. Cellan-Jones 2012). The second is that it fails to capture depth of feeling, or the affective dimension of the interaction that it records. A recognition of the inadequacy of the metric from my participants would also suggest a wider rejection of enterprise discourse, and an unwillingness to imagine their audience in the quantified terms encouraged by Facebook. For Facebook’s discourse to work, the metrics have to be convincing and useful. For this reason, I will briefly consider my participants’ perspectives on these two key absences identified by Baym (the failure of accuracy and the failure of affect).

In terms of accuracy, my participants expressed some reservations, but none strong enough to consider the measurement of Facebook Page Likes as fundamentally “broken”. In this example, “inaccuracy” doesn’t mean recording the activity of bots, but rather the activity of close friends:

Half of it is probably just my friends I guess. That's not that many people. And sometimes I'm like 'I wish I could just start again', and start with zero. And anyone who actually likes the music just like it, rather than having loads of friends who like everything all the time. Cos I'm just like, 'your like isn't really worth anything', that's not an accurate gauge of if people like my music or not. And I find that pretty irritating sometimes. (P15)

In this description, the (impossible) aim of the metric is to record the music's *objective value*, but its application is skewed by social ties that generate good-will towards friends' creative projects. In general, though, the metric is considered to be broadly accurate. One participant was similarly emphasising its shortcomings as a measurement tool, before concluding: "but I think yes, if it went up suddenly by a thousand, we'd all be like 'oh my god, likes on Facebook, this equates to people liking us'" (P14). The numbers are understood to *broadly* correlate to audience size. The metric, as a tool for imagining one's audience, is satisfactory. (In any case, the accuracy and applicability of the metric is to some extent socially determined by others — it matters because promoters say it matters.)

In terms of the realm of affect, it is true that this metric is not adequate for showing, as one participant put it, "the quality of Like" (P15) — that is, the depth of feeling behind the decision to click that Like button, which might be half-hearted or impassioned. But I think Baym neglects to fully consider the ways in which quantitative metrics might still have an affective dimension, particularly for the "owner" of the metric. This participant spoke on a theme that was common in my interviews, of Page Likes as symbolising a general show of support:

I know that we've got about 200 likes on Facebook page for [redacted] and I'm like oh that's quite cool, 200 people like what we're doing, that's really nice. So I'm not embarrassed about it at all, I see it as a cool sign that people are interested in the stuff that I'm creating. (P9)

The metric of Facebook Pages Likes does not fail on Baym's key areas of sufficient accuracy and recording affect: my participants see the metric as valid, and they find meaning in it. The question, then, is whether my participant's usage of these metrics might lead them towards complying with Facebook's emphasis on aspiration and growth, or whether they might find different sets of values in the measurements which

might serve some resistant purpose. For example, in seeing my friends' bands listed on my Page as competitors, am I brought more into line with Facebook's enterprise discourse, or am I still able to read "against the grain", and perhaps more clearly identify the ideological distance between myself and the platform? Do the metrics work to bring about compliance or resistance?

In short, the metrics do both. Here are two quotes from different participants reflecting a similar approach:

It's nice to see it [i.e. the number of Likes] go up, cos it's usually when we've played a gig, so that means that we did a good job of playing a live gig, that people have gone on afterwards and want to follow us. (P16)

That's quite nice to be like, hey, I remember I saw that person last night, they've now come and found us and Liked us on Facebook 'cos they obviously enjoyed the set. I like getting new Likes because you can relate it to those moments. (P27)

One of the fundamental qualities of Likes is that it is the outcome of a process of reification; they are social relations made into a thing (and, slightly confusingly, that "thing" is also immaterial). This reification is compounded by the tendency for social media "texts" to hang around — what Baym calls storage (2015, p.7), and boyd calls persistence (2013, p.11) — and to be looked at whenever the user desires. In being reified, they take on a value separate to the social relations that they are intended to reflect. Grosser considers this in terms of Baudrillard's concept of the "simulacrum", as a sign with no referent (2014). This is even implicitly acknowledged by Facebook, in their invocation to like your own Page because it looks good to others, demonstrating that Likes signify something other than an individuals' "liking" for the thing in question.

Bolin and Schwarz write on how big data presents information at a level that is too abstract to be meaningful, and that it therefore needs to be "translated back" into more traditional categories of understanding. They find evidence of this happening at both the organization and individual level (2015, p.8). The two quotes from practitioners above suggest that something similar happens when DIY practitioners find meaning in reified metrics — they translate the quantitative back into something qualitative. The meaning

of the numbers here comes from practitioners' capacity to unpick the reified numerical representation offered to them, in order to review and retain the social relations that went into it.

The notion of “mining” social media data is becoming commonplace, and Helen Kennedy identifies this activity taking place in “ordinary” small organisations as well as global corporations (2016). I would like to characterize this activity of unpicking metrics using the related subterranean metaphor of “digging”. Digging is an *affordance* that, like mining, suggests an unearthing of value through processes of excavation, filtration, and the exercise of judgement. But where mining takes place on an industrial scale, with a methodical approach and specialized tools, digging is undertaken by individuals and small groups, scrabbling inefficiently for value amongst the detritus using simple tools — in Kennedy's four categories of social media data mining tools, my practitioners use only the simplest, “in-platform” resources (2016, p.20). We frequently “use new media for interpersonal purposes”, says Baym, but since social media offers fewer “social cues”, we “come up with creative ways to work around barriers, rather than submitting ourselves to a context- and emotion-free communication experience” (2015, p.64). Digging is an affordance made possible by social media's tendency to offer persistent and explorable metrics, and utilised by users who have access to the data, but who have limited conceptual and technological means of interpreting it, and who seek to apply their own moral frameworks to their findings.

I also want to consider this social media “digging” as a kind of “pottering around” with data and metrics, which often operates in a way rather different to that intended by the platform. For example, one practitioner is considering the usefulness of having demographic information on their Page that informs them where in the world their Likes are coming from:

It's vaguely interesting, I guess? Like, that they break down every city and country, the people that like you... that's interesting. But, again, it's sort of indifferent because it doesn't make any difference to... I don't mind, or, I don't care who likes it, it's just nice that they like it. I really don't mind who it is, their age or their gender or where they live. It's completely irrelevant, basically.
(P19)

With no marketing plan or global expansion strategy (due to scale, perhaps, but also an aversion to such things), this data can't be instrumentalised or acted upon, rendering it interesting only in an abstract sense. Finding this data “vaguely interesting” constitutes a sort of non-participatory resistance; even if metrics audit for growth, they might be counteracted without much effort by lack of interest in competition, or an unwillingness to distinguish people based on national borders.

So, practitioners demonstrate a fruitful ability to look beyond metrics and back into the social relations that form them, and to ignore and misuse data. Admittedly, in the first example, this affective dimension only comes about because Facebook specifically allows Page owners to delve into that information at the individual level, and see the names and profiles of individual audience members. But from here it is also possible to see how the number as a whole might continue to serve an affective purpose, as a representation of accumulated moments of memorable social value. This is beneficial, inasmuch as it suggests that an engagement with metrics needn't constitute the loss of the specifically emotional connections associated with music (see Jakobsson 2010 for a similar overview of emotional responses to metrics, in this instance on YouTube).

The ability of the number to reflect values other than growth also carries a moral dimension. One of Facebook's key incentives to encouraging an aspirational approach amongst Page owners is to encourage the usage of Sponsored Posts — advertisements that cost little (starting at £3), and can “boost” the reach of a post. There is a significant incentive to do this, as Facebook tightly restricts Pages' capacity to reach audiences without paying (and seems to be increasingly tightening the squeeze on “organic”, i.e. unpaid, reach (Loten et al. 2014)). However, several of my participants suggested that to pay Facebook for this service would be unethical:

It doesn't seem organic to me. That doesn't seem grassroots or DIY to me, to pay Mark Zuckerberg some money to post our advert. I dunno, maybe I'd rather do a whole fucking other tour to get the exposure that that Facebook post would get. (P16)

Another practitioner similarly scolded: “you've gotta earn your Facebook Likes. You've gotta gig and earn them” (P4). This was delivered slightly tongue-in-cheek, perhaps aware of the extent to which this rhetoric echoed more conservative notions of hard

work bringing about reward. But nonetheless, part of the reasoning behind refusing Sponsored Posts is about keeping that number of Likes *honest*. Marx drew upon the Roman Emperor Vespasian's declaration, *pecunia non olet* ("money has no smell"), to expose money as the only commodity which, having only exchange-value and no specific use-value, was able to fully hide its origins (Marx 1976 [1867], p.205). But some Facebook Likes, apparently, do "smell" a little off. Which is to say, in Marx's terms, that something of the use-value lingers, and affects the extent to which Likes can offer an untainted exchangeability, or act as a transparent means of comparison between bands.

The beneficial consequence for DIY ethics here is that Facebook Page Likes might carry a metric measuring something other than growth. A quantitative metric, designed only to measure and compare size in positive terms (the bigger, the better), might be subverted in order to represent a degree of ethical purity, or distance from commercialism. This might provide a means of resisting the "self-blaming" that is central to enterprise discourse, seeing smallness not as a lack of fortune or talent, but as a manifest consequence of a specific ethical approach — a decision to choose insularity over openness.

But this quality is undermined in a couple of ways. Firstly, it's not always clear what's going on in the murky world(s) of music promotion and online marketing (for e.g. the ambiguous rewards offered to social media "influencers"), and therefore not at all obvious which bands have earned their Likes by fair means or foul. This means that *it isn't a very good measure of ethical value*, even if some practitioners use it to this end. Secondly, many of my participants believed, to a large extent, in a positive correlation between talent and reward best summarised by the maxim that "cream eventually rises to the top". This perception that the smoke-and-mirrors of marketing "can only do so much" means that whilst a band's large audience might be to some extent "inauthentic", it is also to some extent deserved. Fame and success are self-legitimizing, and by implication, so are obscurity and failure. (I address this further in chapter 7, in the context of optimization and user choice.)

These kinds of perceptions do lead to some approaches to metrics that would seem to be more in keeping with enterprise discourse, and that demonstrate the negative

consequences of the “graphopticon” proposed by Grosser (2014). Here, a practitioner reflecting on the (in their eyes) excessive focus on metrics maintained by someone else, then turned towards their own practice and their changing approach to the numbers:

I found out the other day that [my fellow band member's] old band would delete a [Facebook] status if it got less than something like 12 Likes. They'd say 'it wasn't popular, delete it', cos how does that look to a label, sort of thing. And that's just such a conceited, contrived way of living your online life. And I'm not saying that's [not] something that I maybe have thought in the past — that didn't go down well so how does that come across to people, or, do we look lame that we said something kind of stupid, but... I just don't give a shit anymore, I don't. That's such an empty way of living, it's not colourful, it's like you're living your life as ... you're equating things all the time, you're considering things so much, when you could be chilling out and having a nice time. Rather than worrying who did or did not like a status. But the internet can make people neurotic like that cos it's a competition. (P16)

This participant reiterated a few times during our interview that they were consciously trying not to think about the numbers, in order to enjoy the experiences of writing and playing music more fully. As I described above, practitioners do frequently find positive values in metrics shown to them. But, given their inescapability, and the extent to which they drive feelings of insecurity, there was a general sense that overall it would be better not to know.

So, to move towards a conclusion, there is a duality of perspective at work. On the one hand, quantitative measures are effective at capitalising upon nagging feelings that fame (or some kind of recognition) is deserved and that growth constitutes success. On the other hand, practitioners know that there is some meaningful dimension of their activity that remains uncaptured, and that the Facebook Pages measurements are “shallow”. One practitioner directly equated this ambiguity towards their Likes with a feeling of switching between two distinct mental states:

I go in and out about caring about Facebook likes, and when I'm more insecure about music, that's when I know all my numbers. And when I'm more secure about my music that's when I don't care, about anything. [...] I think it's just recently with the release of that album I was just very emotional and temperamental about everything, so I know all the stats for everything that ever happened. Whereas also like, the numbers really don't mean anything. They

really really don't. [...] That's something where there's loads of cognitive dissonance in my brain about it. (P15)

Reification here has the beneficial consequence of the numbers sticking around, echoing the “persistence” that danah boyd has identified as one of the four key affordances of social media (2013, p.11). This means that when this practitioner is feeling insecure, the numbers carry the highly valuable sense of actually being there. They reflect the undeniability of the fact that *something happened*, even as they alienate the practitioner from their feeling of creating or controlling that activity. However, it is important to understand the deeper negative effects of seeing reification as security. Finding one’s own worth in the exchangeable (i.e. *I am 500 Likes...* and that’s *something*) is an act of self-commodification, a championing of exchange-value at the expense of subjectivity. Through this frame, it is difficult to find value in one’s self other than through one’s mediated representation, i.e. value to others. This leaves the practitioner with a lack of “core” — a construction of the self that is, as Jodi Dean puts it, “reflexivity that goes all the way down” (2010, p.11).

On the other hand, as the quote above demonstrates, there are times when practitioners feel “close” to the music, where the numbers seem not to interfere. This might be considered in terms of “flow” (Csikszentmihalyi 1990), where a high degree of immersion in musical practice results in a strong sense of the self as unified and embodied. There are specific times when this flow is in operation — during writing, rehearsing, playing, and performing. Flow is often afforded during activities that are “clearly bounded by time and space” (Turino 2008, p.5), and in this context the unending distraction of social media is a significant barrier to immersion. Flow is also linked with a loss of self-consciousness (Hesmondhalgh 2013, p.33), where one is not reflecting on how one appears to others. The construction of the self is far more secure, and seems to be enacted with no barrier between thought and action, or between meaning and intent. The nature of these moments is such that it is difficult for metrics to get “in-between” practitioners and their musical engagement. These are areas that are currently beyond the “capture” of communicative capitalism. When the “flow” is good, it is not that the numbers take on a different, *ethical* meaning, but rather that they cease to mean anything at all.

Katharine Silbaugh, writing on the rather different subject of whether academic exams constitute commodification, argues that what is so destructive about quantification is that it “places pressure to re-design the world so that we place our energies behind only what is measured” (2011, p.325). This highlights the way that power is exercised not through measuring the success or failure of individuals, but through the putting in place of specific measurements that then work to shape individuals’ and groups’ sense of what is valuable. Those in control of measurements are in control of what is audited, and we work to meet their criteria. In this case platforms have a high degree of power which is exerted not only through the metrics themselves, but also the enterprise discourse presented in notifications and other features, which serves their goals of accelerating content circulation. However, as Jurgensen’s “omniopicon” model of social media suggests, the *social* is still fundamental in how meaning is constructed through metrics (even though Jurgensen suggests it is the social put to work as surveillance) (2010). Dawn Nafus argues that as data becomes “domesticated”, people develop their own “sense-making methods” in a variety of ways (2016, p.384). Even an “audit culture”, we have some say over the values that we hold dear, and they may not be the values that are measured.

My analysis shows that the influence of metrics and datafication is pernicious, but that in two significant ways, it is limited. Firstly, practitioners are capable of “digging” to find different meanings in quantitative metrics, meaning that they can find alternative understandings which emphasise qualitative dimensions, and also that they can apply their own moral frameworks to the numbers provided. Secondly, there are still plenty of times and places where people are able to forget about the metrics, and focus on rewarding and satisfying activities (i.e. music-making), even as other dimensions of these activities (i.e. the reification of music activity into social media metrics) generate unhealthy feelings of alienation and compulsion.

5.3 Safety, online and offline

In this section I consider the tensions between insularity and openness that are expressed in a discourse of “safety” — a discourse that is increasing central to DIY music practice. I start by briefly considering the impact of “safe(r) space” policies on

DIY music venues in Leeds. I then move to consider broader conceptualisations of safety amongst my practitioners. I argue that the critical importance of safety within contemporary DIY marks a significant shift from previous DIY scenes. I suggest that safety has benefits which might be understood in terms of resistance: it increases the likelihood of successful communication within the scene, it protects marginalised and vulnerable people, and offers opportunities for self-realisation without fear of recrimination. However, there are also downsides: an avoidance of friction with other music scenes leads to missed opportunities for critical reflexivity, and for music to play a transformative role in society. I then move online to consider this safety in terms of social media activity, positioning this within a literature of concern over the effects of the “echo chamber”, or “filter bubble”, of social media, and its impact on engagement, inclusivity, and resistance.

The concept of a “safe space” (or, sometimes, “safer space”) has its roots in feminist activism of the late 1960s, in which attendance at some meetings was restricted to women, in order to ensure their autonomy over decision-making. The logic of the safe space was also based on an understanding that many social and cultural norms were rooted in sexism, and therefore a space which allowed for the temporary escape of those norms was beneficial in developing individual and collective political awareness. The notion of safe space moved from feminist activism to the gay communities of New York and Los Angeles in the 1960s and 1970s, where gay neighborhoods would be policed by activists who would meet homophobic abuse and harassment with physical force (Kenney 2001). Whereas early feminist safe spaces were intended to discuss and bring forward new solutions in terms of political action, in the gay community the safe space *was* the solution, ensuring that gay identity could be publicly performed within that space. Even though they are often considered “safe havens” rather than “sites of resistance” (Myslik 1996), safe spaces have assisted groups, movements, and individuals to develop and practice autonomy, to think and act critically, to temporarily forego oppressive and discriminatory cultural norms, to express one’s self, and to help facilitate the unhindered self-expression of others.

The most substantial attacks on the concept of safe spaces in recent years have come from the traditional press (mainly right-wing broadsheets) in the UK and US (Travers 2017; Gosden 2016), and also from the growing presence of white nationalism online,

particularly from the US, in the form of the “alt-right”. The issue has also been raised in Parliament: Conservative MPs asked Theresa May to condemn “so called ‘safe spaces’ in universities” in September 2016 (Thompson 2017). In this negative coverage, safe spaces tend to be misrepresented in two ways. Firstly, they are presented as an encroaching threat to free speech, foisted unwillingly on the silent majority by a vocal cabal of “social justice warriors”. In actuality, safe spaces usually have distinct borders either temporally or physically (e.g. a single room is designated as a safe space for the duration of a meeting), and almost always require the participation and consent of those present. Secondly, these sources equate safety (and the accompanying concept of “trigger warnings”) with an unwillingness to engage and debate with different viewpoints, a critique often closely-linked to the assessment of millennials as sheltered and easily-upset (e.g. Hosie 2017). In fact, safe spaces may well have the potential to bring about *greater* engagement with difficult subject matter, especially in educational settings (Mayo 2010), creating an environment in which fear (and in many cases genuine trauma) can be replaced by curiosity and critical exploration (Thompson 2017). Thompson argues that, at their best,

safer spaces practices *make life difficult*: they require us to attend to often unarticulated power dynamics and hierarchies that exist “in here” as well as “out there.” They require us to become sensitized to forms of encounter that we are too often desensitized: to soften to that which we are otherwise hardened. They force us to rethink common-held understandings of violence and harm; and to take seriously the action of speech-acts. (2017)

Potentially, then, the notion of “safety” is rather misleading, and might be better understood as re-prioritising (in Fraser’s terms) the “recognition” of marginalized identities over the comfort of non-marginalised people who are the primary beneficiaries of the “common-held understandings” identified by Thompson.

Wharf Chambers and Chunk, the two most prominent co-operative DIY venues in Leeds, both have a safe(r) space policy. Wharf Chambers’ is available to view online (Wharf Chambers n.d.); I first encountered Chunk’s policy when I saw it pinned to their front door at a gig in April 2016. The policy is a key tenet that practitioners were able to point to as something that differentiated Wharf from other (non-DIY) venues, and also from the other pubs and clubs that share its city-centre locale. On the weekend in

particular, Wharf Chambers attracts many visitors who are less likely to be aware of its political and cultural history, and the safe space policy is a means of ensuring that the space still “belongs” to those who have a closer affinity to its politics, and in particular the queer community.

There was a general awareness amongst my participants that placing emphasis on the safety of scene members, and attempting to ensure that the space was free of homophobic, transphobic, racist, ableist, fat-phobic, or sexist harassment or abuse, might have a knock-on effect in terms of inclusivity measured across other demographic axes, particularly class and educational status:

That [safe space policy] does give you a degree of protection, but then it replicates a problem of ‘we’re only inclusive to people who are already in.’ And it is brilliant, it’s brilliant and a lovely, amazing safe space where we’re all really on it, and we all protect each other, but you’re only allowed in if you already know how to play by these rules, and you already know some people in it. (P9)

However, their ability and desire to change this was limited by the lack of any easy solutions which might bring new people in whilst prioritising the importance of protecting the safety of oppressed or marginalised people with the space. Most people seemed to think that, all in all, the current trade-off was worth it. Many practitioners felt, understandably, tired of acting as the educator to people who they feel it is not their job to educate. Practitioners are not just (unpaid) stewards of the scene, but beneficiaries of it, and the never-ending work of being inclusive to ignorant newcomers might affect their ability to fully participate:

It [DIY] is kind of an outreach thing, and making it accessible to other people who might benefit from it, but also, if it’s the way that I make friends and the way that I meet partners, I kind of just want it to be a nice space for me to have fun, where I can just go out and not worry about people being dicks, and not have to make too much of an effort with people I don’t know, and have a safe space just for my own enjoyment. (P9)

The existence of venues such as Wharf, Chunk, and to a lesser extent (for my participants, at least), Temple of Boom and Brudenell Social Club, provided clear

“homes” for DIY music. Other venues, such as Santiago’s, Fox and Newt, and The Packhorse, were seen as reserve choices (for a combination of reasons related to location, equipment, costs, and general “vibe”) and would be hired by promoters only if their venues of choice are unavailable, usually in the prior knowledge that the gig will be poorly attended as a result of being in a less popular venue.

In general, it was undeniable that the scene was in a much *stronger* position than ten or fifteen years ago, in terms of having spaces to call its own.² However, this led some participants to reflect on the potential downsides of a kind of safety which, whilst not associated directly associated with the safe space policy, was strongly associated with the stability of Wharf Chambers in particular:

It’s a hard thing to talk about because I’m in a very privileged position, but I know people who the safe space policy is there to protect, much more than me, cos in the street they feel threatened ‘cos of their gender or the way they look, and those people often want the friction that we’re talking about in a gig, as well, which doesn’t exist as much in a space like that. [...] Don’t get me wrong, this is me really nitpicking cos like, I think I couldn’t really wish for a better space than Wharf Chambers for what I’m interested in and put on and stuff, so this is complaining about something ridiculous in a way, but there’s something I miss about seeing a very extreme band, in the kind of space that doesn’t make sense. (P12)

My participant is careful to distinguish safe space policy from a different, vaguer conceptualisation of “safety”, but nonetheless is drawing a broad correlation between the two. This was a common theme within interviews: an identification of safety as having very significant benefits to the scene, and also having some subtler, less significant downsides (which I unpack below). Whilst this *comparative insignificance* of the downsides of safety was often stressed, I feel that here, as part of a critical account of DIY music politics, might be an appropriate and useful place to consider what kinds of value might be found in the “unsafe”, whilst retaining an awareness of the

² In terms of the generalisability of my findings, I should note that the stability of Wharf is not necessarily a common feature of local DIY scenes in the UK, although newly-established venues such as DIY Space For London (DSFL) are increasingly following Wharf’s lead in providing a single, stable space for DIY shows and events within a city. Additionally, Wharf Chambers’ long-term future is by no means assured, as a leased property within a highly desirable area, and as the increase in construction of city-centre housing means that live music venues are increasingly threatened with closure due to noise restrictions (Davyd & Whitrick 2015).

discriminatory social norms that necessitate safety in the first place. With that in mind, I have identified five different, interacting conceptualisations of “safety” which are often conflated or undifferentiated within the scene:

- a) The safety resulting from safe space policy (safety from harassment, abuse, violence)
- b) The safety of the scene (i.e. well-established, routinised, and potentially *mundane*)
- c) The safety of musical genre (lots of indie and pop-punk rather than more “difficult” music)
- d) The safety of performance and experience (gigs as free of shock or surprise)
- e) The safety of online community (which relates closely to several of the above)

I would like to consider all five of these “safeties” as impacting on the cultural resistance offered by contemporary DIY, and as having specific consequences both individually and when considered together. Returning to that quote above from a participant, what might be the beneficial effect of a musical performance that “doesn’t make sense”? Or, what might be the benefit of feeling unsafe?

For my participants, a conceptualisation of useful “unsafety” would certainly not involve physical violence. Physically intense audience participation such as moshing or crowd-surfing, which might lead to feelings of commonality and together in the “indie” scene (Fonarow 2005, pp.79–120), is generally discouraged in DIY scenes (Mullaney 2007, p.399). Neither would it involve harassment or abuse of the kind that safe space policies are intended to prevent. But it might involve feeling scared or threatened (not as a result of discrimination) in the context of musical performance, and it might mean taking steps to understand different musical cultures as aesthetically different but ultimately relatable, a goal that could potentially be achieved through DIY offering a more diverse line-up in terms of musical styles. One participant warned of the negative effects of an environment in which “everyone in the room has already agreed before they get there that this is how things should be done”. “Yeah, it’s peaceful and everyone feels comfortable,” they acknowledge, “but where’s the evolution of the idea?” (P13). Such a rhetorical question implies that “evolution” (whether political or aesthetic)

requires *friction* of some kind — a process of synthesis resulting from the existent meeting the new.

The benefits of this kind of friction might also be gained by playing shows at other, non-scene venues. This was a viewpoint primarily held by the older, male participants (who are arguably less in need of the “safety” offered by venues like Wharf) rather than the younger ones (whose views are covered in more detail in the case study at the end of this chapter), and they drew on past experience to relate what might be lost in the transition to a safer, more insular scene:

When you make music that you think to yourself is very poppy, playing in a weird pub [as opposed to Wharf Chambers] often highlights how different it is from what actually mainstream music is. I often was in bands that I thought were quite palatable to people in general, ‘cos they had melodies and were fun sounding or whatever, in broad terms. And if you play somewhere like that, you realise that people are like, ‘what the fuck is this?’ Even indie pop, I think, is not that palatable to your average pub punter. It reminds you how you can quickly go down an alley, that the way you think about music changes, so that you see something very extreme and be like, ‘oh, it’s boring’. Being confronted by mainstream culture is quite important to figure out where you are in the world.
(P12)

For these older, straighter, whiter, maler practitioners, this radicality of aesthetic might be especially important for identity-construction, as they cannot fall back on their under-representation in media to give their musical activity any connotation of alterity. However, I think there is a more generous, and more accurate reading of this argument, as highlighting the potential for a more insular approach to downplay the extent to which DIY music contains elements that are valuably critical of mainstream popular culture. A performance that creates friction might help practitioners consider the functions of their music as art (in the sense of a critical reflection of society), as opposed to its function as entertainment (as a pleasurable and enjoyable communication). To present one’s music to an unfamiliar crowd, and to see one’s music fail to engage them, and to still find value in it, might allow for reflection on one’s own subjectivity, and the different “psychic drives” that Georgina Born identifies might be at work within those who seek popular acclaim, and those who value alterity (1993, p.237).

I want to connect this notion of safety to the “safety” of the majority of live music performances in the DIY scene. As Rob Drew puts it, in his ethnography of karaoke bar culture, our performing self is “stubbornly reflexive” (2001, p.61). We do not simply “escape” ourselves on stage, and for the most part we are unable to remove those nagging, doubting questions (“what do I sound like?”; “are people enjoying this?”; “am I making a fool of myself?”) which serve to limit the extent to which performance can make us feel *transformed*. Like Drew’s karaoke singers, most DIY musicians are “ordinary” performers, and the “extraordinary” aspects of their performance are restricted to the extent to which they constitute an anti-performance of the sort that is rarely championed by mainstream media outlets. The ordinariness of the performance arguably serves to embody DIY’s “access aesthetic” — the awkward pauses, mundane chatter, apologies and excuses (“we’ve not practiced in ages!”), re-started songs, and general unwillingness to “work the crowd”, which might in other contexts signify a bad or failed performance, are serving here to demonstrate that a lack of performative or technical skill ought not to prevent participation. The flipside of this unwillingness to create distance between performer and audience is that, in general, there is very little sense of “play”, of trying on new identities, or attempting to move beyond their off-stage subjectivity. In short, performances rarely involve risk. Most performers I saw at DIY shows in Leeds had a shy and restrained stage presence, with real “performers”, in the pop (or mainstream rock) sense of expressive gestures, few and far between.

This performance style reflects DIY’s specific conception of authenticity, rock’s tendency to distrust the visually theatrical (Richardson 2009, p.85), and elements of punk and indie’s disdain for apparently fabricated and conceited performance, which might have beneficial consequences in terms of increasing participation. Nonetheless, I want to suggest that there are negative aspects to this “reined in” performance style, and negative aspects to a scene that is over-stable. Keith Kahn-Harris, writing on extreme metal scenes, argues that central to the scene’s construction is a tension between the “mundane” and the “transgressive” (2004). Transgression is the sense of “exceeding” the body, and the sense of scenic activity as containing radical or “deviant” potential; Kahn-Harris suggests these experiences are more common when first entering a scene. Mundanity is in some ways the opposite of transgression, but is required to prevent “over-transgression”, and is necessary to provide the structure that prevents the scene

from disintegrating entirely. “The problem”, he argues, “is that the experience of mundanity threatens to dominate the experience of the scene to the exclusion of all else” (ibid, p.112), as people seek to make the scene feel “everyday”. In the contemporary DIY scene, this “everyday”-ness provides important feelings of safety, but for some practitioners also brings feelings of mundanity.

Jason Toynbee identifies genre as critical to understanding how specific sets of creative possibilities belong to specific groups of music practitioners (2000, pp.102–3). DIY, whilst generally tending towards indie, rock, and punk conventions in terms of musical elements, does feature a broad range of musical styles including practitioners centred in folk, electronic, and noise traditions (I argue in chapter 6 that friendships in DIY are at least as important genre affiliation in terms of how its networks are organised).

However, Toynbee’s approach is still useful in that it highlights that each practitioner has creative possibilities and tropes that will feel easier or more natural to choose, based on an understanding of their cultural significance. I asked one participant why, given that they liked a wide range of genres including rap and electronic music, they so far had only performed guitar-based, indie music:

I don't know why I didn't go down that lane [i.e. rap], I think it's easier to be... I can imagine myself as a lead singer of an indie rock band and I can't really... [...] I think it's really difficult to be a rapper, I think in certain respects, cos I went to a grammar school, to have artistic credibility, and it's like fuck that, I don't want do that, I can't be fucked with being bullied about rap music or anything so I'm just gonna be in an indie rock band, cos I play guitar really well
(P15)

This suggests that listening to and enjoying a wide range of genres doesn’t mean that one can escape “stubborn” reflexivity in order to feel comfortable or confident making and performing those kinds of music. Hesmondhalgh has identified that in the present day, liking rock music means “more or less nothing, in terms of ‘resistance’ or ‘counter-hegemony’” (2013, p.143), and my participants were very willing to acknowledge the problematic sexual and racial politics of rock and “guitar music” more generally. Nonetheless, their cultural identity, in connection with their class, gender, or ethnicity, means that rock is where they feel able to be authentic. Performing rock music, then, is a means of affirming identity and potentially affirming group communality, but has

limits in terms of its wider relevance — it constitutes a safe, insular approach that acknowledges rock’s niche place in contemporary musical-political culture.

As Toynbee shows, these issues of restricted creative choices are by no means specific to DIY scenes, but the specific spatial and social norms in the DIY scene do serve to reinforce this kind of safety. Bands go straight from mingling with friends in the crowd (often friends will constitute the entire audience), to performing on stage, and then straight back to conversation with friends. The spatial arrangement of most DIY venues lack the kinds of backstage spaces (dressing room, green room, “the wings”) in which performers might psychologically prepare and transform themselves for performance. Even when these spaces are present, the social expectation is for performers to participate fully as an audience member by watching the other bands, rather than behaving as a “star”.

The combination of “ordinary” performers, a DIY-specific conception of authentic performance emphasising accessibility, and a lack of opportunity for preparation, means that the DIY music performances seldom have a truly *transformative* effect on the performer. At their most stilted, DIY shows with high levels of social connection between band and audience feel akin to awkward family dinners at which there is nothing left to be said, not through a lack of affinity, but because the communicative possibilities have already been so thoroughly explored. There are exceptions to this general rule, in the form of performers who seem to have less trouble constructing a temporary performative frame in this environment, but these performers are acknowledged as unusual by participants, generally in positive terms.

In contrast to the older participants, the younger practitioners were far less interested in creating “weird” performances, or being in the “wrong” space:

We got offered this gig recently from a very generic rock promoter [...] at this mixed, local band venue, upstairs in a pub. And it’s like ‘do we want to play that’? We were all joking like, we’re too famous to play this now, and obviously we’re not, but we’ve got a scene we want to contribute to, and it’d be like playing a gig to a group of strangers that probably wouldn’t get it... or at least, I’m not very good at playing guitar — and on the scene that’s fine, it’s kind of my schtick. And it’s like, do we play it? (P14)

Being “famous” is used here in a roundabout sense to denote a context in which communication is more likely to be successful; the image of the “famous” rock star in simpatico with their audience, mirroring their fans’ emotions, and acting as their on-stage representative. The audience knows the songs, they know what to expect, they understand what is being aimed for, and no additional framing work is needed: they just *get it*. A DIY audience might understand the participant’s limited technical proficiency on the guitar as having political or moral dimensions, rather than as an aesthetic failure. Being able to “contribute to” DIY as a “project” gives a deeper meaning to the one-off live performance — even if it is relatively underwhelming as an event, it can take its place within a longer historical lineage (pointing in both directions, to past and future) and thereby accrue additional significance.

In contrast to the communicative distance between them and the imagined “group of strangers” at the pub, the same participant describes playing at Wharf Chambers as a place where communication is easy:

The deck is stacked in your favour when you’re playing at Wharf, it’s a cool space with cool people, everyone’s gonna be really nice, you’ll have a great time, and your music’s meeting the right audience, ‘cos Wharf is your audience.
(P14)

My participant is liberal in their usage of unqualified, positive adjectives to describe the experience of playing Wharf — it’s “cool” (twice), “nice”, “great”, and “right” — and yet there is a sense of nagging dissatisfaction (which again, I should stress, is accompanying a stronger, primary sense of gratitude to and support for Wharf). The future tense creates a tone of assured prediction (“gonna”; “you’ll”), suggesting that there is little scope for unexpected events, either good or bad. In this presentation, Wharf Chambers is a near-frictionless space, mediating flawlessly between artist and audience, but lacking an element of the unpredictable.

To summarise the offline aspects of safety, I have suggested that it affects the resistant value of DIY music in two ways. Firstly, safety makes it difficult for music to provide a *transcendental* experience: to go beyond the everyday and provide the kind of strong emotional experiences that are a key benefit of music (Hesmondhalgh 2013b, pp.12–

56). Secondly, safety leads to a decrease in the amount of situations where music might have a *transformative* power. This is true both within the scene, through a lack of opportunities for performative “play”, and beyond it, due to an unwillingness to risk playing to unfamiliar audiences. I will now move on to consider manifestations of safety online.

The idea that social media might reinforce and insulate existing social, cultural, and political affiliations has is supported by data-intensive research (Bakshy et al. 2015), and popularised through Pariser’s notion of the “filter bubble” (2011). As we “Like” certain types of stories, and material from certain news sites, algorithms begin to learn our preferences and offer new content based on an automated assessment of our previous behavior. However, it is important to put this literature within the context of a more general political polarisation, i.e. a “widening chasm” between liberals and conservatives that has, in the US at least, been increasing since the 1970s (Iyengar & Hahn 2009, p.20). Music consumption has also been increasingly insulated and individualised: Simon Reynolds argues that personal, portable music players construct a “Radio Me”, free of “nasty surprises”, with detrimental effects on sociality (2011, p.118). With this longer political and cultural trend in mind, and also my above consideration of the move towards a discourse of safety in DIY scenes *offline*, it would be a stretch to suggest that an increase in insularity might be *because of* social media. Nonetheless, I move now to consider the impact of social media, and the extent to which it might shape discourses of safety within DIY.

During the period of my fieldwork there was no shortage of lengthy arguments on Facebook between DIY practitioners *about* DIY, often running to hundreds of comments, and this kind of argument was not something I ever observed offline. Social media is increasingly the platform for serious discussion of issues in the scene, such as asking in the “LEEDS DIY” Facebook group whether there is a problem with racism in the scene, or calling out individuals as untrustworthy. Although this has some upsides in terms of being able to think through an argument, and to include people who might not physically be able to attend the same gig or event, the majority of participants saw online arguments as unproductive in practice (as in the case study in Chapter 5.4). Many participants reported a feeling of trepidation concerning online (public) interaction that

they didn't have with offline discussion, that they would be "called out" for saying something offensive or inappropriate:

It [i.e. "calling out"] only happens online, this is the thing, no one would do that offline. Like someone posted 'if we all get together and have a chat about this that would be cool', and no one followed that up, they just carried on talking about the original post, no one went 'yeah actually it would be really good if we could do a focus group,' or anything like that, cos I don't think people really want to discuss this stuff in person. It's so much easier to do it online. It's difficult, cos I wouldn't at any point want to bring up what I've just been saying to you, to people I don't necessarily know, and know me I guess. But the thing is if you do it online, if you post stuff like that online, then it gets screenshotted. (P20)

The "context collapse" of social media here is manifested as an audience which may or may not be on the practitioner's side, and which may use the "persistence" of social media identified by boyd (2013, p.11) in ways that "call out" the offender. The result is that practitioners often try to keep their comments and posts "safe". This is beneficial in so far as it makes practitioners think twice before potentially offending others, but was seen as unproductive for useful debate.

One way in which online and offline safety interact is in the use of online tools to conduct "research" on venues and bands, leading to more predictable events. One participant recalled their early experiences with "entire tours booked on the phone and you'd just end up in some really crazy situations", and contrasted these with current-day tours where "you can see the venue [online] and get a feel for it" before arriving, or before booking the show (P13). Similarly, the abundance and accessibility of recorded music means it is almost always possible to "sample" a band (through Bandcamp, say) to see if they might be to your tastes, before deciding whether to attend their show. One consequence is that people can quickly rule out attending shows, or that recordings might give an incorrect representation of the live experience, as one participant argued with regards to a band he enjoyed:

So, if I was not particularly into experimental music and thought 'okay, I'll see what their Bandcamp sounds like, and it's this screechy lo-fi recording... you wouldn't be able to discern what was going on particularly. That, compared to the experience of seeing them live, which is pretty mind-blowing experience cos

they are so involved in what they do, and it's so loud and all the sounds are particularly extreme in different ways, the high frequencies and the bass [...] I think that could actually make people think 'oh this is amazing' [...] You can really limit yourself based on what you think something's gonna be like, based on the evidence that the internet provides you about this stuff. (P12)

Online records of venues, bands, and recordings impact on the safety of the scene, by giving practitioners the ability to decide beforehand “this isn’t for me”. These social media functionalities — venue photos on Google Maps, venue ratings on Tripadvisor, free streaming on Soundcloud and Bandcamp — seek to replace exploration with information, to avoid unwanted surprises, and in doing so they increase the safety and insularity of the scene.

Online tools have substantially altered the process of promoting shows. Although promoting gigs with physical posters was “more rewarding” (P19), for various reasons (fewer shops allowing posters, declining efficacy, cost compared to online promotion) DIY promoters are increasingly reliant on Facebook Events as the primary tool for announcing and publicizing shows, as well as updating potential attendees with information such as ticket price and stage times. This reliance is so all-encompassing that participants were often unable to identify how people outside the scene might even find out that there was a show on. Other online methods, and particularly local music forums, have fallen by the wayside. Facebook events were reluctantly acknowledged as the best tool for the job, albeit with the unfortunate side effect of encouraging insularity within DIY networks.

Facebook Events are highly limited to those within the friendship group (and “Friends of Friends” network) of those DIY practitioners who are playing and putting on the show. Indeed, although they are public events, their visibility can be quickly diminished if one suddenly finds one’s self outside of the tight circle:

On social media particularly, one big problem I had is that I'd blocked the person who I'd been seeing and broken up with, and also blocked their two housemates, so that I didn't see anything being said to my ex which would be upsetting to me. But then suddenly because I'd blocked all these key players in the queer DIY scene, loads of events weren't even visible to me, and people would be like 'oh, are you going to this thing on the 25th? It's on Facebook'.

And I'd search and nothing would come up, and after a bit, I'd think 'ah, it's probably that the Facebook event has been created by one of these people that I've now blocked'. So that was a bit difficult. [...] And so I feel like nowadays, to effectively participate in the DIY scene to its full potential, you have to be on social media, because that's how stuff is advertised. (P9)

The development of “safe spaces” in DIY has been useful for practitioners in terms of self-expression, and retaining a sense of ownership over venues, even if it might have some exclusionary consequences. However, practitioners identified downsides to a scene being too “safe” in several respects. Most fundamentally, safety assures “good” communication, but negatively affects the sense of movement or evolution within the scene. Practitioners were also concerned by social media’s capacity to restrict the range of views and people that they interacted with. They also felt that social media didn’t offer a productive forum for debate within the scene, and that the persistence of social media content led to specific kinds of interactions based on “calling out” which were not productive for individual and collective well-being.

5.4 Case study: Encountering different scenes online

In June 2015, I saw some of the online fallout of two Leeds DIY bands having a fractious encounter with another band from outside of the scene. Along with piecing together the narrative of this dispute through the online evidence it generated, I conducted an interview with one of the bands in order to discuss it in detail, and I reflect here on their experience in relation to insularity and openness, safety, and the interactions between online and offline activity.

My participants were the three members of a young “queer punk” band from Leeds, all aged between 18 and 21. They were organising a short UK tour with another young Leeds band and, through a family connection with a band already on the bill, were able to get both Leeds bands added to the line-up of a show in the West Midlands (around two hours’ drive away). They were aware at this time that the gig would be something different to their experiences to date playing in DIY venues, and primarily in Wharf Chambers:

I think we're all coming from a DIY sort of scene, it was clear that the promoter doing it wasn't really that kind of promoter. It was just a more sort of 'clubby' promoter, for bands, but we thought yeah just go with it anyway. (P5)

Having confirmed the gig, the promoter then added a band to the line-up whose name contained a strong, bluntly-worded denunciation of Roma and traveller communities, including use of a derogatory epithet. The two Leeds-based bands were made aware of this addition through the title of Facebook Event page being updated to include the new band's name. I refer to this new band as the pub rock band, following my participants' description of them, although their musical and visual aesthetic places them towards the heavier end of classic rock.

One of the Leeds bands then privately messaged the promoter of the show on Facebook, and asked them to remove the pub rock band from the line-up. The promoter acknowledged that he had himself found the name problematic initially but did not remove them from the line-up, instead trying to placate both parties by vouching for the pub rock band's good nature. When the two Leeds bands made it clear that their attendance at the gig was dependent on the pub rock band being removed, the promoter opted to side with the pub rock band as they were local to the West Midlands, had an established following and, according to my participants, he was "was more bothered about getting people in" (P3) than adhering to any higher principles.

Somehow, possibly via the promoter, the pub rock band got word that their name had upset one of the other bands on the bill. This caused a flurry of communication, indirectly and directly, publically and privately, between the various parties. All three bands concerned posted updates from their Pages. The pub rock band's post took a jovial, boisterous tone, expressing confusion and annoyance that another band had been offended; the two Leeds bands posted more circumspect statements explaining why they would not be playing the show. Following this, the social groups around the pub rock band and the two DIY bands (i.e. their friends and members of their respective scenes) were brought into contact with other, through links sent privately and publically by the bands (and also possibly by doing their own searching), with wide-ranging arguments taking place on all three bands' Facebook Pages, and privately between bands on

Facebook Messenger. My participants considered this argument to have been, for the most part, unsuccessful and unhelpful:

P3: *I feel like there was one person I was arguing with who was more level headed than the rest of them. But generally, they didnt wanna, and we didn't wanna, you know... we were both firmly where we were. And it just kept going, the same argument, for ages.*

P5: *It was very circular. But I think when someone used the term 'the PC brigade', I sort of switched off.*

They were, even before these events, very sceptical about the capacity for this kind of online debate to be productive. One participant “switching off” at the phrase “PC brigade” suggests that these are set positions within much-rehearsed arguments. This switching off reflects an assumption that the pub rock band (and their social group) lack self-awareness, which makes debate difficult and perhaps pointless. One participant suggested that “I think they genuinely didn't think they'd done anything wrong” (P5). Another admitted that the pub rock band probably “weren't like, terribly dangerous people or anything” but that “when there's that hint of like sly racism that they don't fully understand it makes you wonder what other issues they're a bit ignorant on and they're probably not fun to be around” (P4). For my practitioners, ignorance here acts to doubly blind the pub rock band, who have accidentally revealed themselves as more prejudiced than they are capable of realising they are.

The Leeds DIY bands' error, according to the pub rockers, was to have taken offence to something that was not intended as offensive. The additional context provided to demonstrate this was, firstly, that their name was a reference to a movie, rather than a phrase of their own creation and secondly, that the band were not themselves racist, and did not have the negative perception of the Roma or traveller community that the band name would suggest. The pub rock band's social group wanted the DIY group to acknowledge this fluidity of meaning, but my participants were unconvinced:

Yeah, I didn't get that argument. Like, 'we're nice people so we can't be racists', but then me personally, I judge someone's being racist on racist actions like choosing to call your band something racist, which is pretty straightforward to me. (P5)

Whilst the DIY practitioners framed the conflict as ignorance versus enlightenment, the pub rock band framed it as common-sense pragmatism versus inauthentic moral hysteria.

The initial suspicions carried by the DIY bands concerning the moral character of their opponents were, they argued, soon justified by the use of homophobic language by a member of the pub rock band's social group, generating more bad feeling between the parties. The arguments on all three Facebook Pages petered out within a couple of days. Some weeks later, the original gig went ahead, with the pub rock band playing, and without the Leeds DIY bands. The two Leeds bands were able to find a replacement show in broadly the same area, promoted by a young, non-musician friend who was inspired by the events to organise and promote their first ever gig. The situation which necessitated its existence clearly imbued it with an added political impetus.

The architecture of social media (specifically Facebook), as utilised by these social groups, impacted the initial friction and shaped the subsequent interactions in significant ways. For example, it was the updating of the Event page by the promoter which initially informed the DIY bands of the line-up change, meaning here that the plain fact of the offensive band name came first, in an automated notification sent to event attendees, without any additional context. When the young organiser of the replacement gig felt there was a threat of violence (after a member of the pub rock band told one of my participants that he would "see you there"), they were able to remove the address from the Facebook event, and instead informed potential attendees privately about the gig's location. Most significantly though, in terms of social media affordances, the bands were able to use Facebook to bring their respective social groups into contact with one another, crossing cultural, social, and geographical distance in order to bring two disparate groups together.

We might consider this last affordance in terms of "bonding" and "bridging", terms used by Robert Putnam (2000) to distinguish different ways in which social capital is developed. Bonding is concerned with strengthening existing social ties within groups, and bridging denotes the work of forging new ties, or activating latent ties, with people from different walks of life. Social media is particularly effective at bonding (Smith & Giraud-Carrier 2010), but also provides the technical apparatus and the social context in

which to transform latent ties (i.e. potential acquaintances) into weak ties (Haythornthwaite 2002; 2005).

The online interactions between the social groups described here are certainly closer to bridging than bonding, inasmuch they create weak, temporary ties. However, the affordance offered by the bands' usage of hyperlinks to connect their social groups might be considered as a very specific form of bridging which exists only in order to mobilise a social group to act as back-up. Unlike types of bridging, it is not creating a weak tie between groups with a view to strengthening that relationship into a strong tie at a later date. The meeting of social groups did not take place in a neutral territory (separate, related arguments were underway on both the pub rock band and the DIY bands' Facebook Pages), and the social groups had already identified their assigned role as a defender of their band.

I use the term “rallying” to describe this affordance. Rallying is intended to get people across to other social worlds only for the duration of the argument — a few hours, perhaps a couple of days at most — in order to be the dominant voice. It is not intended to generate social capital through forging links, although it could perhaps be considered as generating “bonding” social capital, as one social group unites to defeat an antagonist other. Any social bridges established in the practice are not maintained. These bridges are, in a temporal sense, “burned” — i.e. made obsolete through the speed at which Facebook activity moves on — when the rally is over.

It is important to distinguishing this practice of rallying from “trolling” — it doesn't have the “disruptive intent” nor the aim to provoke that is characteristic of that activity (Chandler & Munday 2016b). There were certainly examples of nuanced and detailed replies that were, presumably, crafted over hours, and which reflected well-intentioned, critical engagement with the subject matter. But social media activity has very limited capacity to bridge opposing viewpoints when issues are, as in this instance, highly divisive (see Hendriks et al, 2016). I do not mean to suggest that it is an activity specific to DIY scenes, or to music scenes generally. The affordance of rallying is a combination of disparate social groups with no desire for long-term engagement with one another, and a technology that allows them to be linked fleetingly. The purpose of much of the argument, even when well-argued, is not to convince the other side, but acts as a space

for rehearsing and reiterating beliefs, demonstrating solidarity, and doing political performance in a public sphere.

In concluding my interview with the Leeds band, I asked them whether they thought DIY ought to be concerned with bringing about political changes beyond the borders of the scene:

P5: *I feel like most people I meet in the DIY scene are totally happy for it to exist in and of itself, you know. So a band wouldn't necessarily need to get really famous or make a big social change or whatever. I feel like other local scenes might see small gigs as a starter, but I feel like DIY it exists for itself and that's really good.*

P4: *Yeah it's just about you can influence people around you to a certain extent but then it's about like doing it for yourself, and being happy and comfortable [...] I think especially when you realise how terrible the world is, when you come to that age and you're like 'fuck, actually every things pretty shit', it's nice to have a group around you with the same ideals who all think it's shit."*

P5: *Totally. Or, I feel like a central element of the DIY scene is a community built around safe spaces, so I guess it's just looking out for the people who are there.*

P4: *And a lot of the time it's people who don't feel safe in other spaces.*

By taking on responsibility for maintaining safer spaces within the limited temporal and geographical confines of the gig, they disavow their responsibility for those outside of it. Quite understandably, their primary concern is for the happiness, safety, and comfort of those within the scene, and particularly those who might be at the sharper end of intolerance and prejudice. The work of the DIY bands in denouncing and then debating the pub rock band is best understood as a performance of solidarity, made consciously public through the decision to post updates, rather than continue in private conversation with the promoter.

The DIY practitioners had little faith in the value of online debate, and had identified the two social groups as too far apart for there to be any value in their discussion, leaving no opportunity for learning. The resistant value comes not from engaging with the political other to win hearts and minds, but in reinforcing their own position and

displaying their own specific inclusivity and exclusivities — openness as a work of defending borders. “Rallying” is an appropriate activity to do this work of displaying solidarity.

The conflict also allowed for the DIY bands to define themselves as oppositional and other to what they perceived to be more “mainstream” rock norms. When a member of the pub rock band referred to one of the DIY bands using a derogatory description of their aesthetic which carried connotations of being insignificant and insubstantial, the Leeds band co-opted the phrase, using it as a description under the “About” section of their band Facebook Page. The band were able to draw on concepts of authenticity from indie-pop and post-punk (see Dolan 2010; Kruse 1993) to understand themselves as different to the more masculinist hard rock of their rivals. The value of their conflict therefore ought to be seen as one of restating and reaffirming their principles and, for a young band making some of their first steps in DIY and queer culture, an opportunity to recognize their own identity through recognizing what they are not.

So, this engagement is more about insularity than openness, in that it identifies the importance of difference as a means of affirming identity, and is pessimistic about the possibility to achieve wider change. Having said that, the DIY musicians’ circular argument may have had a more significant impact than they had believed to be possible. Within three months, the pub rock band, who had initially been very willing to defend their decision, were on Facebook advertising their last gig before “starting up again [...] under a new name”.

5.5 Conclusions

Mark Mattern, in his book *Acting in Concert*, identifies three categories of “community-based political action through music” — confrontational, deliberative, and pragmatic — which all imply different kinds of relations between those “in” and “out” of a given community. Deliberative practice can be either inter- or intra-group: either group members “use musical practices to debate their identity and commitments”, or “members of different communities negotiate mutual relations” (1994, p.25). My

research suggests that contemporary DIY music is highly focused on *intra-group deliberation*.

This isn't to say that DIY practitioners aren't looking outwards, or that there's no interest in broader politics — there was plenty of social media activity around the 2015 General Election and the 2016 EU referendum, many practitioners went to rallies, or were involved in direct action for various causes. But their musical activity isn't at the heart of that kind of outward-looking political or cultural activity. The sense of this inter-scene conflict and deliberation being required to launch an “authentic challenge” to dominant norms, as identified by some riot grrrls, is far less observable in the contemporary DIY scene — most people don't want to play to new and difficult audiences, and are happy to understand themselves as “contributing” to the scene rather than branching out beyond it. Crucial to this is a sense that rock and punk-based music which serves as the basis of most DIY music (at least in the scene I observed) is a niche form, and has a limited capacity to be read as counter-hegemonic by wider audiences. And yet, practitioners don't feel capable of making music (and performances) that go beyond these limitations — there are genres in which they fear to tread, and they are constrained by a need for naturalistic modes of performance — even as they express admiration and even fandom for these other genres. DIY music works for self-expression, and for representation within the scene, but practitioners carry no real belief in their music's ability to speak to a wider audience.

Social media's “echo chamber” effect reinforces this insularity in several ways — promotional techniques are more inward-looking (fewer posters, more Facebook Events), confrontations with other scenes are brief and more about self-affirmation than debate, and far more time is spent debating on intra-scene Facebook Groups. Metrics reify social relations in a way that offers some solace for insecure practitioners, and shows some capacity to be re-interpreted, but for the most part encourages engagement with and adoption of an “enterprise discourse” that is highly beneficial to the platform. Direct comparison and quantitative comparability between DIY and far more popular music threatens to undermine the “specialness” attributed to the scene, instead presenting DIY music as niche, irrelevant, and devalued:

I think it's a bit weird to be like, oh my music that no one's ever gonna hear, is really really good, and is way better than [Drake], even though 20 million

people watched that video and it's just like, it doesn't make any sense, that doesn't make any sense whatsoever. (P15)

“Sense” here signifies the pervasive ideology of social media and of capitalism, and which DIY has been contesting for much of its history: that more equals better. Social media makes it more difficult to see beyond the numbers, and to resist the understanding of those numbers as objective assessments of value.

To conclude this chapter, I return to Nancy Fraser’s concepts of “maldistribution” and “misrecognition”, in order to consider how contemporary DIY’s relatively insular approach, and its relationship to social media, might impact on its capacity to offer cultural resistance. In terms of “misrecognition”, the emphasis on insularity has significant benefits. Safe(r) spaces in DIY music are highly valuable in “recognizing” marginalized identities, particularly sexual and gender identities, both at an individual and group level. There are occasions where this insularity results in missed opportunities for recognition on a wider scale, perhaps reflecting a correlation with broader political polarization in the UK. My research suggests that social media *exacerbates* these negative consequences of insularity by providing a poor context for interactions with other scenes.

Social media metrics and the “enterprise discourse” on platforms (particularly Facebook Pages) tends to work against insularity by promoting growth, but in a specifically pernicious way — encouraging “maldistribution” indirectly by measuring and encouraging individualist accumulation. Practitioners are able to resist this in part by a return to insularity, and valuing the sense-making of their DIY music community, but only to a limited extent. Here my research suggests that social media discourse is a significant cause of participants’ feelings of insecurity, as a means of generating and sustaining the flow of content required for social media platforms’ economic viability.

Chapter 6: Community and the Individual

6.1 Introduction

In this, the third of four fieldwork chapters, I examine the tension between the community and the individual in contemporary DIY music, the role of social media and online platforms in shaping responses to this tension, and how these responses affect DIY music's capacity to offer cultural resistance. Previous DIY scenes have taken a variety of approaches in attempts to address this tension, and have taken various positions that emphasise either more individualistic or more communitarian approaches (covered in chapter 3). Post-punk practitioners used the notion of the "collective" to extend band membership beyond those on stage; post-hardcore took the opposite approach and emphasised the internal democracy of the band as "unit" of workers and the coherence of the scene as a whole; riot grrrl implored girls and women to fight against jealousy in order to celebrate each-others' successes.

In the first section I consider tensions between self-expression and representation, and the impact of the internet's emphasis on "relatability". In the second section I consider the extent to which hierarchies effect feelings of community within DIY, and the potential for "convivial competition" to counteract a hierarchical status-order. The third section follows on from this, and looks specifically at how online platforms might "enclose" communal activity through emphasising individual ownership. I conclude by considering the consequences for DIY's capacity to offer cultural resistance.

6.2 Self-expression, representation, and relatability

DIY has historically recognised the importance of representation: giving a cultural outlet to an array of voices and experiences not offered space within mainstream music. In this section I explore tensions between self-expression and representation as means of validating the authenticity of DIY practice — i.e. accurately representing the self, or accurately representing a group or community — and consider their consequences for cultural resistance. In this section I examine the tension between self-expression and the

performance of representation. I argue that social media exacerbates the need for self-expression to also succeed in terms of a wider “relatability”, which impedes individual cultural autonomy.

Efforts towards increasing representation can be seen as addressing cultural “misrecognition” of two kinds. Firstly, *misrepresentation*, in which media depictions of certain groups are based not on their own experiences or understandings, but on the fantasies or anxieties of the dominant group. And secondly, *under-representation* or the absence of representation, where certain identities are “written out” of history, e.g. black musicians in the foundation of rock’n’roll, or women being denied a just amount of screen-time on television. This kind of “misrecognition” is a result of structural inequality; a consequence of media being dominated by an economic elite, but is also a factor in perpetuating this domination, due to culture’s role in shaping (or *telling us*) who we are, and providing the means by which we understand ourselves. Social media has been posited as an important space in which this mis- and under-recognition might be challenged (Huntemann 2015; Daniels 2016, p.55).

Historically, DIY has focussed on the under-representation not of a specific marginalised group, but rather of the failure of popular culture to represent everyday reality for its audience. As in post-punk band X’s “The Unheard Music” (1980), which decries “some smooth chords / [...] no hard chords / on the car radio”, links are made between the symbolic content of popular music and its role in the “consciousness industry” (Enzensberger 1974), therefore arguing that popular music in fact represents primarily the ideology of society’s most powerful people. Later, riot grrrls sought to redress the misrecognition of women on two fronts: as *misrepresented* in popular culture, and *under-represented* within the punk/rock subculture which was supposed to present an alternative for those “othered” by the mainstream.

Self-expression, then, is central to claims of representation — one of the fundamental critiques of popular music has been that it doesn’t express an *authentic* self, and therefore fails to represent accurately — but also carries some specific qualities which might contradict an understanding of representation-as-resistance. Rob Hayler of the electronic music blog Radio Free Midwich (which is Leeds-based, and has connections to the DIY scene I have observed, although focusses generally on more free-form and

electronic music) highlights the benefits of self-expression in their consideration of a “no-audience underground”. This notion, which has gained some critical attention — including a considered response from Simon Reynolds (Incubate Festival 2012) — suggests that DIY and left-field music might flourish in obscurity, relying on a high degree of involvement from a handful of people:

There is no ‘audience’ as such, in the sense of ‘passive receivers’, because almost everyone with an interest in the scene is involved somehow in the scene. The roles one might have – musician, promoter, label ‘boss’, distributor, writer, ‘critic’, paying punter and so on – are fluid, non-hierarchical and can be exchanged or adopted as needed. (Hayler 2015)

Hayler argues that this kind of scene offers a few specific benefits. Firstly, “no-audience” means more or less equal participation, since everyone in the scene is involved in making culture (I address issues of hierarchy in the next section). Secondly, making “no-audience” music might be liberating, insofar as an audience might impose a kind of burden on the artist which can be lifted in this environment. At the centre of this argument is the idea that a radical (and resistant) aesthetics might necessarily be alienating and off-putting, and that an excessive focus on representation might constitute pandering to the audience (a kind of cultural populism on a micro-scale). As with much of the modernist post-punk discussed in section 2.4, the implication is that attempting to *relate* too closely to existing subjects (through musical forms that are close to existing popular music) might inhibit the potential for art to point towards radically new kinds of subjectivity.

In the contemporary DIY music scene, practitioners for the most part see the work of “doing” cultural resistance through the lens of representation — who has it, who needs it, and what ought to be done to ensure it. The emphasis on representation is based on an understanding that a more diverse array of representation might result in music that reflects more accurately the facets of life which are specific to certain groups (and which are erased in, say, more heteronormative, patriarchal, white culture), and also that increasing the visibility of marginal cultural voices results in expanding cultural possibilities for those groups. This is summarised in the maxim: “you can’t be what you can’t see”, a phrase which served as the title for a day of talks and presentations at DIY Space For London (DSFL) in 2016 (DIY Space For London 2016).

As touched upon in Hayler’s concept of a “no-audience underground”, the impetus towards representation impacts on practitioners’ artistic autonomy. For Bourdieu, this kind of autonomy is in opposition to heteronomous production, where power relations in the cultural field are connected to power relations in society, primarily through the means of the market; autonomous production is threatened, therefore, by “the increasingly greater interpenetration between the world of art and the world of money” (1995, p.344). This perspective is echoed by one of my participants, who saw DIY as a space where

you can make selfish music, you know, music that is deliberately, not offensive, but difficult, challenging, but then maybe deliberately anti-social almost, as well. I think that’s an interesting area, cos that’s like ‘I honestly don’t care at all about what anyone thinks of this’, that’s a good thing to be doing with your time, you’ve got no rules to break. (P13)

Again, the connection with Bourdieu is notable, in the discussion of “rules”, and the association of autonomy with an “anti-social” approach. For the most part, however, DIY music has become much more comfortable with adhering to aesthetic rules, and with meeting expectations rather than confounding them (see also the section on “safety”, aesthetic and otherwise, in Chapter 5). In considering the role of representation in art and media, Jen Webb argues that where media (ideally) strives to “get things right” in terms of representing the facts, art has often been the place in which practitioners “shrug off social obligation” (2009, p.107). Much of the music made by my participants tended towards a confessional lyrical style, narrating first-person experiences in everyday language, emphasises an aesthetic of social realism in which closeness to lived experience a valued as a means of “getting things right” — i.e. providing an accurate depiction. This ought to be seen in the context of a convergence between music and social media (i.e. between art and media), where band identity spreads across recorded music and social media output, and there is a pressure to ensure that the two connect to make a coherent whole.

Online, the discourse of representation intertwines with issues of “relatability” in ways that conspire to push self-expression into its most relatable form, with consequences for autonomous production. Practitioners’ output, whether musical or otherwise, is

perennially put up for judgement within the social media panopticon (Jurgenson 2010; Bucher 2012), serving as practitioners' main source of validation. This is particularly true of Twitter, where retweets often signify an identification with the original post. Part of the decision to retweet is assessing the extent to which it might "speak for" one's self; equally then, part of the process of composing tweets is asking one's self whether it might "stand in" for the feelings of another; i.e. "could it represent?"

Platform metrics act as a means of gauging relatability, although this maybe be relatively untroubling for participants with a stronger sense of critical independence: "sometimes I'll tweet stuff and then I'll lose followers, and I'll think oh, maybe it was that particular thing that I said. [...] But I don't find myself thinking 'oh, I shouldn't say this cos it'll be unpopular'" (P9). Facebook Likes can act as a system of representation, providing an opportunity for practitioners to show support, or tie their colours to a mast. One practitioner, caught up in a Facebook argument, reflected on the fact that a fellow practitioner had stood up for them, and that the Likes left on this specific comment in the thread served to give tacit support:

Yeah, I was positively encouraged by the fact he made that point and so many people who were silent objectors, at least they could make that Like, and make their voice known without getting involved. (P1)

As well as the representative function they might play, practitioners are also aware of the *visibility* of metrics, and make decisions that reflect this, curtailing self-expression in order to carry out a kind of "impression management":

So, we [the band] recently culled a lot of followers [...] I'm someone who will just follow people, 'cos I love people [and] I'm interested in what people do and create and who they're friends with and what they do. I'm just naturally really interested in other people's activity cos it inspires me I guess and it broadens my world view. So, like the balance of followers to following can be a bit skew-whiff so we kind of balanced that out, 'cos the impression that that can give sometimes is that you're following in order to get followed back, and that's kind of contrived, and you're trying to be strategic and fake and whatever, where actually the reality is that it's not but I can appreciate it comes across differently possibly. (P16)

On social media, the awareness that interactions are public means that social anxiety plays a role in shaping activity (Marder, Slade, et al. 2016). Ironically, this practitioner was worried that the “natural” follower-to-following ratio (i.e. the ratio as it would be if it were kept private) looked too contrived, and so choreographed a more natural looking contrivance in order to appear more genuine. This kind of awareness also leads to the so-called “chilling effect” on social media (Marder, Joinson, et al. 2016), whereby users display a reduced capacity for self-expression when they are aware of the visibility of their activity. Marder et al suggest that this effect in fact extends *beyond* the boundaries of the platform, with people altering their offline behaviour *as a direct result* of understandings of sociality being deeply impacted by their use of social media. One practitioner expressed wariness regarding this public kind of self-expression:

There’s always a thing with Twitter or Facebook that you’re making your opinion public and you always wonder, or at least I do, what sort of motive is behind that, and it’s not necessarily an ulterior motive... if you’re gonna be like ‘oh this band is brilliant’ or whatever, as I say, there’s always an exchange, you want some sort of reciprocation of your comment or whatever, and it’s just, that seems... quite calculated a lot of the time. [...] You’re essentially parading your morality, or what you perceive to be your good act to the world, and on a micro level I think that’s what people are always doing with tweets and comments.
(P17)

This quote perhaps is over-cynical in assuming an ulterior motive for every public online interaction. But this kind of “parading” is often unavoidable, even if it is not necessarily done consciously or deliberately.

The tension between the community and the individual is manifested on social media as a quest for relatability, where performing representation is rewarded with personal validation. The specific nature of public networks and feedback mechanisms on social media serve to reduce the level of autonomy offered by self-expression. Where the aim is “visibility” or countering a misrecognition, and the goal is therefore to be recognized, this recognition often takes forms that constitute an individual triumph within the attention economy.

I should stress again that this issue is not restricted to the representation of marginal groups specifically. But rather, it is a consequence of a pervasive view of identity not as

a *process*, as Frith would have it (1996, p.109), but as a belonging. Practitioners “being” DIY (i.e. representing DIY) is utilised as justification for self-promotion — I explore the paradoxical nature of this approach in more detail in the next chapter. If a DIY music release shows other people that “anyone can do it”, and therefore represents that implied “anyone”, then steps taken to promote that release constitute “visibility” for DIY, even when those steps go beyond the approaches that would be replicable by “anyone” (e.g. the use of PR companies, Facebook promotion, or use of social capital to curry favour).

That DIY music has a problem with diversity is in little doubt. The indie and punk rock music that is dominant in the DIY scene tends to prioritise and privilege the affective needs and creative output of white cisgender men, something that is widely acknowledged in both the academic literature (Bannister 2006; Kruse 1993) and journalistic accounts (e.g. Sahim 2015). Whilst most practitioners would freely acknowledge these issues, there were some feelings of resentment concerning the emphasis on inclusivity, both in my interviews and that I observed in less formal settings, which seemed to reflect an unwillingness to fully engage with this reality, and to consider what might be done about it. This dismissive response is perhaps unsurprising, since taking inclusivity seriously would necessarily involve a ceding of space and time (i.e. attention) by those who currently have the most of it.

But I do think that, amongst these responses from the straight white men, there was also a more thoughtful response which is concerning enough to be given attention here. What does seem pertinent is that amongst those who acknowledged the need for change and the importance of promoting diverse representation, many were left feeling as though their efforts at creative self-expression were redundant, since they primarily represented their dominant identity. The following two quotes encapsulate this feeling:

I'm just very aware that the world doesn't need another sad, middle-class white guy singing songs about girls. [...] I don't have a problem with the expression itself, and I will still always write songs, but I feel like I'm at a stage where it's very difficult to work out what should be performed, or what is of any benefit or use to other people. (P17)

I've got a hang up on masculinity at the moment, and being white and being male, and I'm very conscious of us being another white, male band and I find it... like I'm just polluting, like adding to the static of white male bands, and so I don't want to do well? I'm just like, 'don't mind us, we'll just play some music', I don't want to make anyone feel over-shadowed, or take the limelight from bands I think are better, that have got a broader spectrum of discourse. (P14)

This is not to suggest that straight white cisgender males in the scene are in particular need of sympathy or special attention: they *do* for the most part benefit from structural biases which afford them easier pathways into music-making. For this reason, their need in terms of recognition is lesser, and it follows that their activity carries less sense of cultural resistance than those who find themselves, in Fraser's terms, more frequently "misrecognised" by society. Practitioners being aware of this privilege, and taking steps to redress the resulting inequality of opportunity, is a positive consequence of riot grrrl and queer punk's substantial impact on DIY music culture.

Nevertheless, the idea that one might be "polluting" the scene is a strongly negative association to attach to one's own practice. One of Jenkins et al's criteria for identifying a "participatory culture" is that it offers a place "where members believe that their contributions matter" (2006, p.7); it does therefore seem worthy of investigation that practitioners like the ones above are engaging in cultural activity that they understand, on some level, to be directly in contradiction with their politics. The potential solution, clearly, is not for marginalised members of the scene to withdraw their claims for recognition. Yet as it stands, the only option for the two men above is to "keep on keeping on" with their heads down; in cultural resistance terms, a dereliction of duty based on the assumption that there is nothing for them to do, except for to stand aside. (In the next chapter, I make some suggestions regarding a future direction for DIY practice that might meaningfully reconnect recognition and redistribution in order to offer more holistic means of cultural resistance.)

In this section I have noted the increased emphasis placed on representation in DIY. The emphasis on representation of marginal groups within contemporary DIY is still very much a work-in-progress, and constitutes perhaps its most effective form of cultural resistance. However, placing an emphasis on representation in the attention economy currently functions in ways that are compatible with unequal distribution: discourses of

“visibility” can support an individualistic promotional culture, and limit focus on redistribution. But I have also highlighted that the negative connotations of a “representative” approach more broadly — namely, inhibition of artistic freedom, and a desire to please others rather than to express one’s self — are now also experienced as part of a “self-expressive” approach, within the panopticon of social media.

6.3 Hierarchies of recognition and “convivial competition” in DIY

The popular music industries have long relied on a business model in which a few wildly successful “hits” subsidise the numerous “misses” (Toynbee 2000, pp.16–17), creating a concentration of wealth, power, and attention around a handful of best-selling music celebrities. Part of the claim to legitimacy made by DIY music scenes has been that, in part because of their less (or anti-) capitalistic approach, their social composition is “flatter” (i.e. less hierarchical), with fewer distinctions between “big” artists and small, and also between performers and the “ordinary” members of the audience (see Dale 2012, p.6, on punk's "no heroes" approach). Contemporary DIY practitioners are less sceptical of pop music fandom than their predecessors, and tend to underplay the disparity of power between artist and audience (and the connections between this disparity and economic and social inequality). Nonetheless, my participants emphasised “inclusivity” and “participation” as critical goals for the scene (goals which were not always met), and there remains a strong interest in dismantling artist/audience hierarchies and critically interrogating power dynamics *within* the scene.

In this section I examine the existing hierarchies between individuals within the Leeds DIY scene, and consider the resulting consequences for resistance. I argue that DIY does have a “status order” which prevents full parity being achieved, but that this status order has some specific characteristics that might valuably support attempts towards redistribution and recognition. I then move to consider the ways in which a scene that contains these internal hierarchies might nonetheless find value (and take pleasure) in each other’s achievements, using Harvie’s notion of “convivial competition”. I find that my participants’ practice does often support this notion, although such behaviour is largely dependent on an individualistic anticipation of reciprocity. Whilst this aim of

reciprocal recognition is maintained within online activity, certain aspects of social media platforms tend to reduce these feelings of communality.

In considering issues of hierarchy and status in small music scenes, I draw gratefully on Matt Stahl's rich ethnographic study of the San Francisco indie-rock scene. Stahl argues that this scene, even whilst it attempted to emphasise its inclusivity to musicians and non-musicians alike, was rife with "processes of hierarchization":

Jerry-built stages and light and sound systems in bars, cafes, small clubs, and even house parties elevate, illuminate, and amplify performers over nonperformers. In addition to money payments (however small), free drinks, "backstage" areas, and guest lists privilege musicians over audience members. Local weeklies and zines run reviews, photos, interviews; college and community radio DJs plug local musicians' shows and feature their music and voices as interviewees and guest DJs, increasing their visibility and audibility in the local urban environment. (Stahl 2003, p.140)

Musicians have a superior status to other members of the scene, even as they attempt to create spaces where this might not be the case, or use favours (like guestlist places) to redress the balance. Stahl is sceptical that their approach was successful in dismantling hierarchy, and therefore whether the scene he observed really constituted a valuable kind of resistance. In Nancy Fraser's terms, these kinds of hierarchies constitute a "status order" that prevents "participatory parity" (2000).

Amongst my participants, there was an understanding that economic rewards were not conducive to participatory parity, and might serve as a motivation for individualistic behaviour. DIY was, for one participant, about "like, the whole not-profit thing [...] not making like a hierarchy out of it, like nobody's earning loads of money, and then just like a cut of it goes to the bands or whatever. It's just like everyone trying to cover the costs of it, not making a profit" (P7). The insistence on operating not-for-profit is intended to remove the economic incentive to behave self-interestedly, thus removing the threat of "maldistribution" (see my discussion of "alternative economies" in Chapter 3.3). Some participants were able to identify what *wasn't* DIY by identifying the places and people who seemed to be more interested in the money than the music and the people: for example, one promoter recalled being "marched to the cashpoint" by a punk

band who clearly didn't share the same understanding of what constituted acceptable DIY practice (P19).

So, as with Stahl's indie-rock scene, the hierarchy within DIY is seldom about earning money, although the *symbolic* importance of who gives money to who is important, and losing money is an unfortunate consequence of DIY activity which does limit participation (which almost all my participants will have experienced at one point or another). Primarily, though, I argue that the hierarchies are more often brought about by "misrecognition" rather than "maldistribution", even when money is involved. For example, the standard practice of giving door money to bands, rather than to promoters, indicates that the scene prioritises musicians as most worthy of valorization, and demonstrates the scene's commitment to *the music itself* (and the musicians who make it), in contrast to the industry's parasitic appropriation of profits away from musicians and towards supporting their own perpetuation.

Participants were aware that attempting to side-step issues of maldistribution was not sufficient, and that hierarchies were also established through uneven recognition and representation (even if they didn't use the term). One participant argued that, as well as being not-for-profit, DIY ought also to involve "not doing it so that you become 'the dude' or whatever, like [...] not doing it for kudos and your own elevation" (P12); another similarly remarked that "I don't do DIY stuff to be celebrated or to get kudos" (P1). Nonetheless, kudos exists within the scene.

Stahl suggests that the hierarchies he found are perhaps an inevitable consequence of the artist-audience separation within rock (and popular) music: "In rock culture, sacralization of individuals and bands—the valorization of certain 'non-economic' forms of capital they hold—is typically a unidirectional process, and no amount of 'you've been a great audience' can change that" (2003, p.157). DIY has often attempted to re-frame relationships between artist and audience, and between artists. One participant spoke against the normalisation of the idea that some bands are "headliners" in DIY gigs — although for the most part having a more recognised band playing last (i.e. headlining) is standard practice. And despite DIY promoters' emphasis on not taking money themselves, they do receive other rewards. Stahl's description of the "paradoxical" nature of hosting ("at the same time servant and honoree, fulfilling and

incurring obligation, deepening social ties” (ibid, p.153)) is a useful way of considering DIY promotion as in some ways a difficult and relatively thankless task, but also one that offers credibility and status.

My analysis suggests that there are three kinds of important figure within DIY, with substantial and significant overlap between them, as many people adopt more than one of these roles. The valorisation of these roles, and the resultant hierarchisation, constitutes the specific “status order” of DIY, with specific consequences for “participatory parity”. I label these three figures the *musical role-model*, the *cultural gatekeeper*, and the *moral compass*. They each have the ability to define and control what is and is not considered to be DIY practice.

Musical role-models are those artists or bands who others seek to emulate, or that seem to characterise the aesthetic of the scene as a whole, as well as playing a representative role (discussed above in 6.2). For example, the pop-punk band Martha, based in County Durham (but with close social ties to the Leeds scene), were often referred to as a lodestar that defined the sonic direction of the national scene, potentially with some negative consequences in terms of diversity: “people look up to like Trust Fund³ or Martha and just wanna be like that, and then we just get loads of bands that sound like that” (P15). One participant, attempting to explain the importance of a new Leeds band, did so by noting their potential to emulate Martha’s current totemic position:

I think they’ll be a little bit of a highlighted name in a while. They’ll be a band people know. They’ll be a Martha. People will look at them and go, these are special. (P1)

Bands like this are able to act as a yardstick by which to measure progression, and playing with a musical role-model constitutes a bigger occasion than a more everyday show: “it’s like, oh my god, we get to play with this band, like playing with Martha or something” (P14). Receiving recognition from these role-models therefore constitutes a conferral of status, and confirmation that one’s DIY practice has been validated by those who seem to best know what it is and ought to be. Some participants suggested

³ Trust Fund, my own ongoing musical project, was sometimes discussed as being in this category of band, much to my embarrassment (although Martha and others occupy a more exalted position). I address the relationship between my research, my music, and the scene in Chapter 1.3.

that the influence of these role-models served to inhibit a wider range of aesthetic possibilities that might enhance DIY's capacity for resistance (see discussion of "safety" in Chapter 5.3).

Cultural gatekeepers are those "central nodes" in a DIY network who have the social connections to bring people together, and thereby grant access to the scene or to specific opportunities (Taylor & Jones 2015). These gatekeepers are the people with knowledge of how to book shows, or with the contacts to get themselves onto the bill; with the contacts to find instruments and equipment at the last minute, and with the ability to command an audience. This is the kind of knowledge that DIY is supposed to demystify and share freely, and efforts are made towards this end. In the national DIY scene, there are events like "First Timers" at DSFL (DIY Space For London), in which only musicians or bands performing for the first time can play — the organisers describe the event as a "celebration of demystification" (First Timers, 2017). For technical skills such as sound engineering there is often an informal "shadowing" system, where asking an existing sound-person to learn how to "do sound" constitutes a kind of ad-hoc apprenticeship. Additionally, working as a collective can allay some of those fears around being insufficiently connected or lacking the requisite abilities — my own promotions collective in Leeds was established for this reason, and allowed five of us to put on shows more confidently and successfully than we would have otherwise. But there was concern that however informal their role, these gatekeepers were mainly "white males" (P11), and that in this respect DIY was failing in its commitment to inclusivity. As promoters, performers, or venue staff, those in gatekeeping roles make up a great deal of the symbolic meaning within the scene, and it has been noted in other studies of DIY music scenes that this can be where a disparity of influence is most strongly seen — e.g. resulting in a scene dominated by boys in which girls are the "supporting cast" (Mullaney 2007).

The *moral compass* figure serves as the embodiment of good DIY practice, thereby offering an insight into what actions constitute "being" (or not being) DIY, and carrying a higher status accordingly. These figures are often recognised for their longevity which, in a scene where burgeoning careers and families do lead to a drop-off in DIY activity at a certain age, demonstrates not only commitment (i.e. being a "lifer"), but also an important knowledge of the scene's history. They might have specific skills

which are highly valued but do not give them “gatekeeper” status — e.g. guitar repairs, print-making, or technical ICT skills. Whilst these people might also be cultural gatekeepers or musical role-models, often their relative obscurity on those fronts can work to demonstrate their own moral fastidiousness: one participant emphasised the virtue of practitioners who “toil away for years” without recognition (P14). However, a long-term adherent to the DIY principle of “not doing it for kudos” might, ironically, be recognised as worthy of significant respect and prestige. Moral compasses help to determine the boundaries of DIY practice, but might also be used justification for practices that could otherwise be considered as transgressions from DIY ethics: one participant told me that “if [local DIY practitioner] plays [big venue], then it’s okay for us to play there” (P18). Moral compasses are crucial to DIY’s specific status order, functioning as part of an informal system of checks and balances which might stymie the more aspirational strivings of the role models and gatekeepers discussed above — although this is increasingly undermined by a more individualistic approach in which “it’s up to them” becomes the central tenet of a non-interventionist DIY ethics.

So far in this section I have identified that DIY music has its own specific “status order”, based on its valorisation of *musical role-models*, *cultural gatekeepers*, and *moral compasses*. However, the presence of this status order does not necessarily mean that there is no sense of camaraderie or shared purpose within the scene. In fact, some internal competition might be valuable if it is arranged so as to bring benefits to the community as a whole, as in David Harvie’s notion of “convivial competition”. Harvie uses the term to consider competition and collaboration in academia, arguing that competition can be “convivial” when there is a broadly shared objective, when it is sufficiently distant from the concerns of the marketplace, and when it is helping to motivate people to contribute to a “commons” (2004, p.4).

A similar sense of advancing collectively through individual contributions is developed in Howard Becker’s theory of “art worlds”. Becker argues that within such worlds practitioners might, through a “mutual appreciation of conventions”, generate “a shared sense of worth which they collectively produce” (1982, p.39). Ruth Finnegan, drawing on Becker’s work to consider music communities, finds that this sense of collective production is present within multiple sites: brass band members identify strongly with their own bands, but also identify with “the ‘brass band movement’ as a whole”; folk

musicians similarly had a “strongly held, if not always articulated, set of ideas about the kind of enterprise in which they were engaged” (1988, pp.52; 66).

In DIY this sense of collective production is linked to some extent to ideas of shared authenticity, but it also draws upon its political alterity and sense of partaking in cultural resistance. This provides an often-powerful conception of DIY as a communal “movement” in which all participants are seeking approximately the same ends. This feeling of a “commons” within the DIY scene is well illustrated by the following excerpt, in which a participant outlines the way they felt the DIY scene was composed of people with a similar outlook:

It's always felt like people are just happy that there is interesting music that's being created, and people want to share it, and if you like something, you want to do your best to make sure as many people as possible can hear it. Even if, and probably particularly if, it's not your own stuff. If you hear a fantastic track by [DIY band] or whoever, you think that's a brilliant track, and you want as many people to be able to hear that. So from that perspective, part of it is wanting the best for these artists and those acts because you're in a similar position and you'd think 'if they thought that about my track, they'd do the same'. And that's not necessarily competition, it's that we want the world to be filled with brilliant music, rather than crap music, so as many people as possible should be hearing, you know, that song or that song or that song. (P22)

This feeling of conviviality — that practitioners are working “alongside” rather than “against” each other — relies on at least three kinds of shared understanding. Firstly, a shared understanding of who is in (and out) of the group; secondly, a shared understanding of the aims of the group; and thirdly, a shared understanding of how the aims are to be achieved. In this instance the aim is to fill the world with “brilliant music”, which also assumes a shared definition of what might be considered aesthetically “brilliant” (and what might be “crap”). The means of achieving this are identified here as being based on *reciprocity*: i.e., being willing to behave in broadly the same way as my participant would when presented with “brilliant” music (“if they thought that about my track, they'd do the same”).

This reciprocity is fundamental to the sense of community in the scene. A similar kind of reciprocity is identified by Stahl, who argues that the San Francisco indie-rock scene

is based on assumptions that demands made for attention and status will be paid back: “‘You may not be in the spotlight this time,’ goes this logic, ‘but your attention to another who has claimed the spotlight guarantees you a brief tenure in that position in the near future’” (2003, p.158). Much of the attendance and participation in DIY scenes is undertaken with a similar logic in place, even if practitioners are quick to assure that this anticipated reciprocity is not the *only* or *primary* reason for offering their support:

P24: *I think it is literally about supporting other people who are doing similar stuff to you and as a result, because you do that, you know or you hope that you’re gonna get that in return. Yeah, that’s maybe how I view it, and that’s certainly why now I always make the effort if I know people... even if I’m not a million per cent into a band a promoter is putting on. [...] And I think you don’t do that cos you’re like ‘well I’d better buy this, cos they’ll buy that’, but you do it cos you want to make sure that they can continue to do that...*

P23: *...to do what they care about. And then you get into things through doing that, through having that open mindedness. And it’s not like an in-crowd loyalty, it’s like a... I guess it’s like a co-operative attitude. You end up being exposed to things by having each other’s backs.*

The feeling of a DIY “commons” breaks down, therefore, when practitioners feel like their efforts towards supporting others aren’t being adequately reciprocated. One practitioner, who had fallen out with a few members of a scene in a different city, discussed feeling this lack of support, in the form of other practitioners not attending shows:

I guess they were busy, or I can’t make them come to shows, or it’s their life, I can’t make them feel guilty for not supporting me cos at the end of the day it’s a charitable thing and I can’t feel bitter at people if they don’t come to shows cos it’s... the luck of the draw or whatever. I try not to think like that cos it makes you resentful. But the fact of the matter was, these were people that I’d supported but didn’t support me back, in the community, or what I thought the community was meant to be (P1).

Feelings of being (at times) unsupported or under-appreciated were fairly widespread — “I take it really personally when people don’t come [to gigs]” — and usually balanced with an understanding that people lead busy and complicated lives, and that individuals rightly have the choice to opt in or out of attending: “obviously things happen, you

don't have to go to everything" (P19). This is true, of course, and compulsory attendance would hardly be a viable or appropriate option (even though one practitioner did suggest something along these lines). Nonetheless, these small decisions — to go or not to go, or to buy or not to buy — accumulate over time into what Stahl calls “residual overbalances of value” (2003, p.150), and thereby constitute and maintain a hierarchy that counteracts feelings of conviviality.

This reciprocal approach to community takes on specific forms on social media, and in the online “attention economy” (Davenport & Beck 2001). Whereas literature on the attention economy has largely been concerned with individuals competing for the precious time of their would-be audiences, in the DIY scene this landscape has present the problem of how to ensure a multiplicity of voices remain heard, and that the sense of convivial competition can be retained:

P28: *A lot of us who initially started using Facebook more, it's like, 'we just have to click Like on each other so we all stay connected'.*

Interviewer: So that's because of the Facebook algorithms?

P28: *Yeah. But this is because these are all the people who were the carryovers from MySpace, this is like, 'how do we make sure that we keep each other in the same news feed, that we're all still showing up?' ... and that's how. And it's like, if you wanna promote someone's music, click Like. Even if you don't like it, click Like if you think someone you know should know that that exists.*

Interviewer: So it's like a signal boost.

P28: *Yeah, [...] to just mean you want people to know it's part of your world.*

In taking this collective action in order to “keep each other in the same news feed”, this group of practitioners based their activity on an understanding (or assumption) of how it will be interpreted and utilised by social media algorithms. This is akin to what boyd calls “hacking the attention economy” (2017), where “hacking” needn't constitute a deeply tech-savvy intervention, but rather any gaming of the system to achieve a desired end.

The specific affordance here, of “boosting”, results as a combination of practitioners’ understanding of social media algorithms, and their attempt to maintain the kind of reciprocity that I have identified as a common-place motivation within the DIY scene. Gaming the system in this way is an attempt collectively “lift” each other’s voices in order to achieve the cultural democracy that online platforms so often promise (Gillespie 2010). The term “boosting” has existing connotations of online cultural resistance: “signal boosting” has been used to promote a diversity of voices in feminist blogging, and within online circles concerned with intersectional social justice (Rentschler 2017); the U.S. self-proclaimed “internet poet” Steve Roggenbuck gained popularity in the early 2010s using a similar definition of “boost” as the focal point for a more participatory and radical internet, based on the mutual sharing each other’s creative work (Roggenbuck, 2012). The language of “boosting” has now also been adopted by Facebook — to “boost” a post means to pay money to have it reach more users’ News Feeds.

On the other hand, there are some specific features of the social media landscape that threaten to break the hold of convivial competition. The sense of “shared goals”, for example, is compromised by features like SoundCloud’s “autoplay”, the algorithms of which seem to make no attempt to follow a user’s choice of track with something aesthetically or even geographically related:

[...] even if you click on somebody else’s track [i.e. someone in the scene] and you listen to it, suddenly you find yourself listening to something completely different, cos you let it cycle through and it’s ‘other tracks you might like’, or something. Like oh, what’s this, I’ve never heard of it, and that’s not what I expected to hear — I’m not really in the mood to listen to some electro-soul at the moment. (P22)

Shank argues that a scene consists of “excess of symbolic meaning” (1994, p.122), but online there is often no opportunity for this excess to develop, partly because one’s attention is so fleeting, and partly because content isn’t always grouped in a way that would usefully develop this excess. The only thing that all music on SoundCloud has in common is that it is all on the same platform — part of the promised “celestial jukebox” (Goldstein 1994) of online music that celebrates the phenomenal size and scope of the whole, rather than any of its individual component parts. Here, the notion that “we all

want there to be more brilliant music” and “less crap music” is undermined by the sense that SoundCloud’s autoplay serves to elide aesthetic difference.

One participant was highly appreciative of the offline scene in Leeds (“you go to Wharf [Chambers] and watch a show and there’s no need to romanticise a past of thirty years ago, cos it would have felt exactly the same”), but in contrast, argued that the online experience was bewildering, and lacked the requisite information in order for it to be properly processed. “In some way,” they argued, “there’s just too much content, and the problem isn’t too much content, it’s that that content isn’t contextualised or localised in a way that makes sense to our brains” (P17).

The sheer amount of competition online can one feel less “convivial”, even when one acknowledges that there are shared aims and tastes which might form the basis of an understanding:

P23: *Like, sometimes I’ll be on one of those days when you’re looking for new music all day [online], and I’ll find like ten other labels who have an amazing roster, and I’ve never heard of, and I’m like ‘why would anybody care about [my label]?’ and I do feel an element of competitiveness and defeatism, at the same time. But then, you don’t wanna compete, you wanna support each other, and there have been opportunities where we’ve collaborated with people, and those have been probably the most rewarding things that we’ve done. But I don’t think you realise how common you are? Do you know what I mean?*

P24: *Yeah, I think when you notice how many other labels are on Facebook you’re like... ‘yeah’, [sighs]...*

P23: *Damn, that niche is not as niche.*

P24: *There’s a lot going on...*

Several participants remarked on the sense that, online, supply of new DIY music greatly outstripped demand — something that feels less relevant in local, offline spaces. There are “twenty million bands”, remarked one participant, “and not everyone is waiting at their computers for new music” (P21).

In outlining his concept of “convivial competition” in academia, Harvie is clear to identify a neoliberal higher education policy (and the resulting competition for students’ fees) as threatening to this sense of aiming towards shared goals. “Within such an environment,” he argues, “it is not surprising if individual researchers and research teams co-operate less with rivals, and become more aggressive in claiming ‘ownership’, i.e. enclosing, of ideas” (2004, p.4). Similarly, Stahl’s critique of the indie-rock scene’s attempts to draw a connection between his participants’ difficulty in sharing out attention equally, and the specific conditions of liberal modernity that serve to valorise the individual (2003; these tensions are also explored in Stahl 2013). Social media is just one factor in this landscape, alongside other incitements to individualism, particularly a long-term political shift in the UK towards neoliberalism: much of the communal approaches fostered by punk and post-punk had the safety net of a more forgiving welfare state, and free higher education (Frith & Horne 1987). Nonetheless, notions of ‘convivial competition’ are undermined by certain features of online platforms — especially the tendency to bunch different scenes together at the expense of context. In the following section I explore these features in more detail, with specific attention paid to forms of ownership.

6.4 Taking ownership of DIY practices on social media platforms

Jason Toynbee uses Bourdieu’s concepts of “habitus” and “field” to argue that the processes of music-making are deeply social, in that they constitute (both in terms of composition and performance) a process of choosing from “the particular universe of possibles” within a field of musical production (i.e. a scene or genre) (2000, p.40). Similar to Becker’s “art worlds” (1982), this suggests that music-making is a kind of collective production, both at the point of origin (composition, performance, etc.), and also in the ways that music is received and used. Yet, in the music industries, emphasis is placed on the musical work being the “intellectual property” of a single or a few individuals, rather than of the field; copyright law supports this understanding of creativity, with royalties affirming songwriters (and, for mechanical royalties, performers) as the owner-creator of the musical work, and the ones who are therefore enabled to transfer those rights to record labels and music publishers.

Previous DIY scenes have attempted to find alternatives to this model of individual (or small group) ownership, recognising its problematic consequences for participatory parity (i.e. the hierarchies discussed above). The final (to date) issue of seminal zine *Riot Grrrl* closes by highlighting that “this name is not copyrighted... so take the ball and run with it!” (re-printed in Darms, Lisa and Fateman 2013, p.56), emphasizing collective responsibility by handing over the reins to whoever might want to take them up. But the majority of DIY practice has involved artist-audience relations that echo those found within rock and pop music more generally. The frequently espoused notion of the rock band as a “democratic unit” within DIY (emphasized by UK post-punk and US hardcore/post-hardcore alike) has positive dimensions, but also serves to emphasize the binary nature of group membership (in or out). The status of bands and artists as *named* entities within the scene serves to bound or “enclose” the musical work in a mode of ownership that inserts a claim of recognition in-between musical practice and the community: music *belonging* to entities *belonging* to a scene. Ultimately, these entities can leave the scene, taking their music within them, along with the collectively-produced symbolic meaning contained within it (this is essentially the process captured in the notion of “selling out”).

The internet, with its capacity to connect and draw contributions from users across the globe near-instantaneously, has not only brought about new kinds of creative practice, but also ways of imposing order and taking ownership over this practice. This section considers the means by which DIY practitioners assert ownership over their practice online, the extent to which this impacts on feelings of community (and the “convivial competition” discussed above), and the consequence of these activities on DIY’s capacity to offer cultural resistance. I argue that for the most part DIY practitioners (especially bands) are inclined to act in ways that are largely compliant with social media’s “brand” logic, and that new potentials for collectivity are under-utilised and relatively unexplored within contemporary DIY.

When considering their online practice during interviews, my participants would often reflect on their earliest experiences of the internet, and the previous kinds of DIY (and non-DIY) music culture they had encountered there. For most participants, these early experiences pre-dated the centralisation of content that characterises the present-day online landscape. Whilst using MySpace was a formative experience for many, this was

part of a larger ecosystem that included blog networks, genre- and scene-specific news sites, forums and message boards, and substantially more email usage. Forums and message boards were remembered especially fondly. In Leeds, there had been at least two active local music forums, which served as a hub for organizing and sharing:

I think the forum at that point was a very, very fertile place for people to, like, bounce gigs off each other... this understanding that there were so many people doing similar things, felt like you were part of something, I guess. (P22)

This memory of being “part of something” suggests that forums are (or were) a clearly bounded space in which individual activity was contained with a collective effort. This sense of collectivity wasn’t limited to local forums. For example, the indie-pop forum Bowlie (later re-named Anorak) served through the mid-to-late-2000s as a hub to connect activity across this international scene, with sub-forums for key UK cities (and other global regions), and for discussing specific aspects of indie-pop practice (promotion, songwriting, artwork, etc.). These kinds of sub-divisions helped to limit problems with spam and unwanted or irrelevant posts. Hierarchies on forums reflected the kinds of status discussed above, as well as taking some forms specific to this forum context, with role division (admins, moderators, etc.) offering a “technical” power (i.e. to delete posts and ban users), and data such as “join date” and “post count” publicly illustrating a user’s length and depth of commitment (see Baym & Burnett 2009 for more on the ambiguities of indie-pop fan labour in a similar context of blogs and forums).

This online architecture of multiple, disparate websites is now largely gone, rendering many of these old sites either defunct or derelict:

If you look at a post from about 2006, there’ll be like pages and pages of discussion on the [Leeds DIY listings] forum, just in the community around that, and all the gigs and like genuine enthusiasm that has migrated totally to Facebook now. (P12)

Robert McChesney argues that the internet has had “several lifetimes in the course of two decades”, moving from a space that was “singularly noncommercial” to “a private sphere of increasingly closed, proprietary, even monopolistic markets” (2013, p.97;

Curran 2016 traces a similar history of growing commercialism). Whilst these forums came slightly later than the “noncommercial” phase, their heyday occupied part of the internet’s “critical juncture” — the period in which society’s relationship to the internet was still in flux, and the range of potential futures was therefore broader, drawing on radical, normally unthinkable options (McChesney 2013, p.76).

This critical juncture now seems to be over and, in terms of cultural resistance, efforts towards redistribution have been harmed by Facebook’s monopolistic hold. Historically, DIY practitioners have heeded Garnham’s maxim that “it is cultural distribution, not cultural production that is the key locus of power and profit” (Garnham 1990, p.162), and have sought to establish and operate within distribution channels under their own control (with Rough Trade et al’s “Cartel” as arguably the apotheosis of this approach). Where the old system of forums and fan sites operated as an online equivalent to these channels, with power divested amongst a collection of small sites owned and operated by practitioners, online DIY activity subsumed within Facebook constitutes the concession of a large degree of distributive control. In terms of the relationship between the community and the individual, this means that much individual online activity is no longer contained under the canopy of a DIY distribution channel, and the sense of contributing to a wider cultural resistance is diminished.

The obvious corollary to forums on Facebook are Groups. Groups offer the same sense of “bounded-ness” as forums, since they separate off taste-communities from the rest of the site, and many of the same features (discussion threads, the ability to operate a selective membership policy) although without some of the subtleties (most notably they lack the capacity to create specialist sub-forums). However, these Groups do not provide the same home for social activity:

They’re over-saturated with constant posts about gigs, or people, or bands, or spam. And people don’t read them. I don’t read those groups. I don’t think a lot of people do. It’s messy? It’s a really messy way of doing things. (P19)

This association of Groups with “spam” was often made. Definitions of online spam tend to centre on the communication being unsolicited, and being sent indiscriminately (Chandler & Munday 2016a); quite different from Groups which practitioners have

voluntarily joined, and which constitute a discriminate audience with an express interest in the niche subject at hand. The sense of “spamming” then results not from the content itself, but an excess of self-promotion which accrues here and renders the Group ineffective for social purposes.

Scrolling through the feed of the most prominent Leeds DIY Facebook Group in August 2016, I found that out of the twenty most recent posts, sixteen were drawing attention either to a new music release or an upcoming show or event, alongside one request for a sound engineer, one ‘band members wanted’ post, one update on a new rehearsal studio construction project, and one post-grad researcher looking for archive materials (not me!). The most prominent UK DIY Group featured the same ratio of promotional posts (sixteen out of twenty). The assumption that nobody reads the Groups re-enforces the sense that self-promotion isn’t particularly harmful. This cyclically renders the Group less readable, and the end result is an assumption that Groups are *inherently* of limited use: “a lot of the people were on a [big] Group a couple of years ago that kind of died a death for some reason and I think since then people have been jaded about Groups and don’t think that it works” (P1).

Because of the high proportion of promotional material shared on these Groups, many practitioners alter their notification settings from “All” to “Friends”, thereby receiving notifications from the Group only when their existing friends post or comment in there. This means that existing social networks are reinforced, as practitioners only see material from their friends, even in groups that are intended to be recording a wider range of scene activity. This also reinforces hierarchies, as the best-connected people (i.e. with the most Facebook friends) find a bigger audience, even in Groups. This constitutes a “filter bubble” (Pariser 2011) working at a micro-scale, creating divisions based on differing social networks within the scene, meaning that the Group as a whole speaks for and to no-one. Unlike the old forums where collective responsibility and a sense of shared ownership created conviviality, Facebook Groups’ capacity to act as a public forum for the scene is undermined by a sense that self-promotion is the most appropriate use of the tool, and by the ways in which filtering of unwanted content is performed by end-users, rather than at a shared level.

The primary means of managing the online presence of music projects is via Facebook Pages; every participant I interviewed had admin control over at least one Page. And, as I identified in Chapter 5.2) Pages are a business-oriented platform that promotes “enterprise discourse” (Banks 2007), seemingly at odds with the ethics of DIY music. One practitioner conceded that Pages are “less chatty” than other options (i.e. Twitter), and provide fewer opportunities for sociability (P21). Why then, do practitioners opt to make Pages for their projects, which are so deeply implicated with branding and marketing, and seem to construct a more obviously competitive relationship between practitioners? My fieldwork suggests there are two key reasons.

Firstly, Pages offers a sense of validity and legitimacy. Setting up band accounts is the way that musical activity becomes “real”, even if it precedes any music-making taking place:

Yeah, [band member] set us up a Twitter before we'd even had a practice, which feels really ill-advised [laughs]. I remember we hadn't even decided on the name, I wanted to call it something else, and then they set up a Twitter and I was like 'ok, well I guess that's what we're called now'. and the start was just him like a lot of people being like 'who is this' and them being like 'a band, we haven't had a practice yet'. It's weird cos they're not very forward, but they immediately went in on the Twitter. I don't know why, I think possibly it was like a thing that meant we had to exist, because they'd... I guess we were talking a lot about it, and then he set that up, and so it was kind of a driver to do stuff.
(P21)

In this way, present-day DIY is in thrall to the norms of popular music-making in similar ways to its predecessors: legitimacy is achieved by “enclosing” the activity within a band name. This sense of legitimacy is enhanced social media’s tendency to make “being seen” the means by which one’s subjectivity is confirmed (Hearn 2010). Facebook Pages serve a means for collecting feedback (qualitative and quantitative) on the success or failure of the “reflexive project of the self” (Giddens 1991, p.53).

Secondly, Pages act as a means of keeping one’s practice as a discrete from the scene as a whole, allowing for accrual of the kinds of status discussed so far in this chapter. Whilst social media has a role to play in this, it must also be reluctantly conceded that the practice of making music is deeply imbricated with notions of self-realisation that

hinge on music being used as a source of increasing one's status. Even within a scene that *does* have a strong sense of community, music-making is presented in ways that are highly proprietary, in order to distinguish one's work from the work of others. This is true of music-makers in particular. One practitioner recalled a friend being downbeat due to their inability to find exactly this kind of status:

She's like, 'why don't I have any fans?', and I'm like, it's cos you make friends with all your fans: when people come up afterwards and say 'I really liked it', you sit and have a pint with them and they become friends. (P16)

Even if the term “fans” wouldn't be the most common way to explain this relationship (and it's notable that the above anecdote was recollected to me second-hand, and therefore perhaps contained a less guarded use of language), artists seem for the most part to *want* the feeling of recognition that comes from their work being valued in this way.

Facebook Pages, then, tends to re-inforce individualistic notions of music-making, and come loaded with measurements intended to help practitioners compete and compare with other scene members (see Chapter 5.2). However, I do think that that some kinds of online DIY activity might constitute the seeds of a different kind of practice, and in the rest of this section I explore the potential for a more convivial approach on existing platforms.

The first kind of practice is that which explores the beneficial effects of anonymity. Anonymity online is often associated with negative aspects of the internet (e.g. the notion of “faceless” trolls), marking a change from an earlier optimism that anonymity and pseudonymity might allow for new forms of identity-formation (Turkle 1995; Kang 2000); some recent studies illustrate a direct connection between anonymity and aggression online (Levmore 2010; Zimmerman & Ybarra 2016). Nonetheless even in the forums where some of the worst of this behaviour seems to emerge, such as 4chan, there is a sense of collective action: “anonymity is likely shaping a strong communal identity among a very large set of individuals” (Bernstein et al. 2011, p.56).

This sense of collective identity forming through anonymity has also been the basis for understanding anonymity online as, sometimes, “socially productive” (Bachmann et al. 2017). Rosster and Zehle argues that social media would be an “apt target” for an anonymous “collective critique of political economy”, since on these platforms “openness is synonymous with the expropriation of privacy as users become the commercial product of social connectivity machines” (2014, p.67). Their critique of social media focusses on the close links between individual expression online and data capture, which remains pertinent. But it seems to be that anonymity might also be resistant in other ways.

One practitioner shared a short anecdote about sharing their music online anonymously:

I recorded an album on a Monday morning once, just to trick my friend with, and put that online. And that exists, and that still gets listened to. After uni I had nothing to do, so before bed I wrote five songs, and recorded them on a Monday morning, and was like ‘I’ll make a quick album cover and come up with a name’, and then just put them online and go ‘what do you think to this band’ and he goes ‘they’re alright’. And that was the only reason I did it. I’ve not done anything with it since, they just exist online. (P14)

The activity described here may not seem particularly radical, and indeed the practitioner didn’t identify it as such. But in the context of a growth-obsessed landscape, which emphasises the accumulation of Likes and Follows for some unspecified future purpose, to have done something as a stand-alone cultural text and then to have “not done anything with it since” constitutes something bordering on the resistant. The connection here to a politics of recognition would be that seeking spaces beyond “relatability” might have positive consequences for self-realisation (as explored earlier in this chapter).

Practices emphasising anonymity might have mitigate the individualistic nature of reciprocity within DIY, where favours are offered in expectation of a favour returned, and therefore issues of status order (i.e. people’s capacity to return favours) are necessarily considerations. Another consequence might be to de-emphasise the self-branding norms of the attention economy. One participant enjoyed using SoundCloud because it allowed them to put forward a minimal amount of profile information,

leaving the listener with “just waves” (P28) — remarking on the distinctive “waveform” music player on the site. Anonymity might involve consciously passing up on the *visibility* that is necessary to secure social status in a music scene (Scarborough 2017, p.166), thereby reducing the scale of the hierarchies discussed above.

Having said this, there are substantial benefits to DIY practice when identity is front-and-centre, as I discussed in the section on representation above, particularly in terms of recognition of marginalised identities. I don’t suggest exploring the possibilities of anonymity as a means by which to eradicate difference, and any practice would need to be careful about ignoring structural inequality. Nonetheless, it seems to me to be worth investigating ways in which DIY activity might be separated from the more narcissistic tendencies induced by social media, and how anonymity might refuse norms of self-branding, self-interested expectations of reciprocity, and the accumulationist logic of platforms.

A second (and related) potential approach is based on using the networks established on social media platforms in order to emphasise that DIY music constitutes a “commons”, rather than a site of competition, using features of platforms that are not based around notions of ownership. One practitioner was keen to emphasise the benefits of de-centralising their activity in this way:

It’s not really a proper site that does most of the work for [our skill-sharing collective], it’s just when people use #[collective name] and then you look that up [on Twitter] and you realise: oh my gosh, there’s someone in Indonesia, and someone in Finland, and in Costa Rica, and they’re all hashtagging this thing. [...] It’s become this thing where it’s a skill share, and a source share too. Like we tell people how to work outside the male-dominated promoting system, and even how to write funding grants, or even just how to use your four-track [recorder]. There’s always someone who’s willing to talk to you about something, because there’s so many women now. (P28)

Here the sense of scale that made online competition so daunting and un-convivial is repurposed as a source of confidence, and an assurance that there’s “always someone who’s willing to talk to you”. This practitioner was able to identify their practice as continuing a “punk” lineage, and also as oppositional to “proprietary” forms of organising:

It is really punk-y that way because people are like 'you should have a proper place' but I was like, I think by not defining boundaries of things, like 'this is the home of [collective]', and just saying it's a place you belong to by stating you belong to it, and that's it, it takes care of it. Because there's no proprietary thing about it, it's just something to embolden you, and something you can use whenever you want. And a lot of people were like 'what if someone uses it, or does something...' and I'm like 'what if they do? so what?' [...] I think having an account, even a [collective] email account is kind of not so great. I really wish that people would always write everything publicly, and then we could all help each other, instead of asking me for something, and then me refer. Cos I'm just an in-between person. (P28)

Just as the early internet (falsely) promised the end of the era of advertising thanks to the free flow of legitimate information (McChesney 2013, p.32), in those formative years it was also assumed that the internet would eradicate the necessity of kind of “in-between person” (i.e. cultural gatekeeper) identified here. Early success stories of online music were of artists connecting directly with their fans, with both sides valuing the immediacy of a connection that bypassed intermediaries such as labels, agents, and the TV and radio industries (even though in most cases this “grassroots” process was exaggerated or manufactured for the sake of a good PR story (Brown 2012)). This democratisation of culture has, for the most part failed to materialize (Beer 2008a), as cultural intermediaries continue to filter an overwhelming amount of content for a discerning and time-strapped audience. However, processes of de-centralisation such as the example above show how issues of maldistribution and misrecognition might be counteracted by the cultural gatekeeper figure taking radical steps to work towards their own eradication.

Of course, this activity still takes place on Twitter, and as such these efforts to de-centralise power are necessarily restricted by the business model of the platform itself. Twitter relies on competition for attention as the catalyst for users' advertising spend, and their on-going attempts to move away from a chronological feed and towards an emphasis on “relevant” posts (interspersed with paid adverts) ought to be seen in this context as a step towards affirming hierarchies on a platform that was initially lauded for its democratic capacity. Additionally, efforts to build community on monopolistic platforms don't address the maldistribution caused by the kinds of “digital enclosure”

taking place through capturing and re-selling of personal data (Andrejevic 2007). As Daubs and Manzerolle argue, the knowledge economy operates through a “value network”, rather than a “value chain”, meaning platforms capture value not through production but circulation (2016, p.54), and therefore the shared ownership of scene activity doesn’t counter the dominant economic mode when its circulation is taking place “on” private property. (In Chapter 7.4 I offer a fuller consideration of the potential for open-source technology to act as a medium for cultural resistance.)

Neither anonymity nor hashtag-based “commons” offer a comprehensive solution to these problems of ownership, and bring their own difficulties: particularly regarding the complicated question of how and where to find appropriate financial recompense for creative work. Nonetheless, they offer an imperfect means by which to bypass some of the most pernicious self-promotional aspects of social media. The use of proprietary tools such as Facebook Pages, which focusses attention on reputation and reward, exacerbates the more individualistic tendencies of DIY music practice, and lessens the sense of community within the scene.

6.5 Conclusion

DIY music’s emphasis on community was often the first credo that my participants would reach for as a crucial distinction that marked it apart from other contemporary scenes. Whilst this collectivity is still observably present (particularly in the supportive atmosphere of live shows), social media has impacted its character in three substantial ways.

Firstly, the quest for relatability on social media platforms means that practitioners’ autonomous self-expression is increasingly curtailed by a need to “perform well” as a representative of the scene. Secondly, hierarchies of recognition (which, it must be stressed, have *always* been present in DIY) are exacerbated by publicly visible metrics which measure success and failure in the attention economy, meaning that intra-scene reciprocity sometimes takes on a rather cynical and nepotistic dimension, at the expense of genuine conviviality. Thirdly, platforms’ emphasis on the individual user — as the primary node around which surveillance and advertising is organised — has

ramifications for online ownership of the DIY community, fragmenting the scene into its constituent, nameable, brand-able parts. Social media is the space in which DIY music community is most demonstrably commodified, in large part by its own practitioners who, in seeking to represent and “perform” DIY online, also establish their dominion over its reified form.

Chapter 7: Resourcefulness and Refusal

7.1 Introduction

In this fourth and final chapter of fieldwork analysis, I continue to utilise the framework established in Chapter 3, viewing DIY as a site of tension, and focus here on the tension between “resourcefulness” and “refusal” as contrasting methods of practising cultural resistance. These approaches are most simply summarised as “doing” and “not doing”. Resistance based on “not doing” is often perceived as “smaller” and more individualised — i.e. creating “everyday” disruptions — as opposed to the more joined-up resourcefulness of building movements. In this sense, refusal is often considered to be the less-than-ideal refuge of those whose capacity for movement-building is restricted (Scott 1985; 1989).

In terms of cultural resistance, this tension is centred around capitalism’s ability to re-cast itself, to adopt new forms, and to co-opt and transform the symbols and practice of cultural resistance into something less radical and more compliant (Frank 1997; Boltanski & Chiapello 2005). This necessarily relates closely to the themes explored in Chapter 5, concerning “insularity and openness”. But whereas that tension is about protecting the scene or growing it at the expense of changing its character, strategies of resourcefulness or refusal are better understood as responses to broader existential questions, and concern over the potential inevitability of being assimilated. Therefore, the tension I address in this chapter is the one most closely related to DIY’s relationship to capitalism.

One way in which this tension manifests is in scenes’ relationship to *speed* or *haste*. For example, the riot grrrl movement emphasised the need to act quickly and decisively, arguing that: “the undeniable genius of this generation has surfaced and it’s all about ACTION, no time to decide what’s right what’s right what’s right what’s right” (*Bikini Kill #2*, re-printed in Darms, Lisa and Fateman 2013, p.123). In contrast, the ethos of U.S post-hardcore towards the end of the 1980s emphasized hands-off, “slacker” scepticism as the more appropriate response. This tension might also touch upon issues of postmodernity and crises of meaning, and on resulting consequences related to moral

relativism and a sense of distrust in grand narratives; i.e. refusal as inaction resulting from the fear that what one *thinks* is resistance might not be.

In this chapter, I consider the current position of DIY music in relation to this tension. In section 7.2, I address the consequences of social media's accessibility and ease of use, arguing that much of contemporary DIY practice falls under the category of "platform DIY". In 7.3, I show that agentic decisions regarding resourcefulness and refusal are increasingly supplanted by a logic of optimisation that dominates social media practice. These first two sections in combination are an attempt to show how DIY strategies of resourcefulness and refusal have been *negated* by changes brought about in large part by social media. In the final section I suggest ways in which new strategies of resourcefulness and refusal might specifically address these new challenges. In suggesting these future directions for DIY, I also draw on the findings from the previous three chapters of fieldwork analysis. As in the previous fieldwork chapters, I use a conception of cultural resistance based on Fraser's understanding of social justice (outlined in Chapter 1.4) — a "perspectival dualist" approach that recognises both maldistribution and misrecognition as "intertwined" but argues that neither is reducible to the other (Fraser 2003, p.3).

7.2 "It's hard to see how you could be anything else": DIY as the new default

In 1980, DIY band Scritti Politti were given a five-minute segment on BBC Two's "community action" magazine show *Grapevine* in order to outline the processes involved in do-it-yourself record-making, in which they cover the basics of recording, mixing, pressing, artwork, and distribution. The segment is introduced by the show's presenter Ann Barker, to camera, asking her audience: "Have you ever thought of bringing out your own record? It sounds impossible: surely it's too sophisticated a process, too commercialised, and too sewn up by the big companies? Well, that may have been the case a few years ago [...]" (Meads 2016). However, even whilst attempting to demonstrate its relative simplicity, Scritti Politti's record-making guide makes the process look, at least to modern eyes, prohibitively difficult and expensive. Making one-thousand 7" singles takes around two months, involves "a lot of time on the telephone", involves multiple light-industrial processes, and costs around £500. DIY

circa 1980 required a great deal of *resourcefulness*, not to mention financial wherewithal, in order to surmount the significant barriers to entry.

In contrast, the equivalent DIY processes today involve significantly less difficulty, and far less financial outlay. This change was in part a gradual process: the development and increasing popularity of the photocopier, tape cassette, and home studio technology (Théberge 1997) made record- and zine-making incrementally easier and cheaper in the intervening forty-odd years. But mainly this process has happened rapidly and recently, as a consequence of the personal computer becoming a ubiquitous feature of everyday life, and the internet becoming the primary conduit for finding and listening to musical recordings. Digital production has substantially lowered the cost of recording music, and digital distribution platforms mean that sharing recordings with an audience is often completely free (whilst physical releases are still prized, they are no longer necessary in order to get music heard).

DIY emerged in an age in which doing-it-yourself “sound[ed] impossible”; it operates now in a world where DIY culture has, according to the rhetoric at least, become commonplace, thanks to the social web’s emphasis on user-generated content and the ease of “sharing”. In this section I reflect on the potential for DIY music to offer cultural resistance in an environment where self-releasing and operating independently constitutes the “default” option for most music practitioners. I suggest that DIY emerged as critique of what was perceived to be a Fordist model of cultural production, but that much of contemporary DIY practice (which still draws on those critiques) is ineffective at countering the new economic arrangements that underpin “platform capitalism” (Srnicek 2017a). In fact, the emphasis on DIY as a subcultural and/or “resistant” approach serves to underplay and disguise the ways in which platforms capitalise upon the (mostly) unpaid activity of DIY practitioners. I also use Harry Braverman’s notion of “deskilling” (1974) to consider how DIY being “easier” has some obvious and substantial benefits, but I argue that the automation of DIY practice renders it compliant with platform capitalism, and therefore tends to increase economic inequality rather than redress it.

For Srnicek, platform capitalism is “centred upon extracting and using a particular kind of raw material: data” (2017a, p.39), and it is this logic that dominates the arenas in

which contemporary online DIY music activity takes place. This means that platforms do not necessarily own the cultural product itself, but rather they “provide the basic infrastructure to mediate between different groups” (p.44). In this way they are able to gather far more information on users than traditional companies whose products and customers depart them at the point of sale, and present themselves (somewhat misleadingly) as “empty spaces for others to interact on” (p.48).

In the context of assessing DIY resourcefulness as a means of cultural resistance, there are a few significant consequences of platform capitalism. The most significant change is that platform capitalism encloses the “reservoir” of un(der)paid non-professional cultural workers identified by Miège (1989, p.30), bringing amateurs of all kinds — DIY musicians, but also YouTubers, photographers, novelists, etc. — within the confines of the platform. Platforms do not invest in users, and do not own their products, but are nonetheless able to systematically profit from the “content” generated, through collecting and re-selling data. Therefore, independent practitioners are still doing it “themselves”, but in ways that are highly compatible with platform capitalism.

Another important change is that the biggest record labels — the monopolistic multinationals that previously provided the “them” to DIY’s “us” — are required to participate in the platform ecology in order to meet their audience, and therefore occupy the same turf (YouTube, Facebook, Spotify, etc.) as amateurs and hobbyists. This is not to say that they are on equal footing with DIY practitioners: the “big three” (Universal, Sony, and Warner) have back catalogues valuable enough to act as bargaining chips, substantial marketing and organisational resources, and still dominate television and radio. However, DIY for the most part no longer occupies a separate “underground” network. Big labels no longer have exclusive access to key distribution channels, and it is therefore no longer accurate to say that DIY music lacks “access”, even if it still lacks exposure. Additionally, those who aspire to a more mainstream success are no longer cutting themselves off from this possibility by choosing DIY methods (something I explore in more detail in the following section).

A third important change is that platforms offer accessible, automated solutions in order to make it easy for one person (or one group) to take control of processes from start-to-finish. Bandcamp and SoundCloud take care of global distribution within minutes, and

can be reinforced by services like DistroKid and Tunecore that register music to the major streaming and digital sales platforms; Dropbox is used to send files privately to allow near-instant collaboration; WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger provide the communication infrastructure to organise gigs; Facebook Pages and Events are the means of publicising and marketing. All of this has specific consequences for Braverman’s understanding of “deskilling”, as I will address later. But the important point for now is that the holistic approach valued by DIY is now commonplace amongst creatives looking after their presence on a portfolio of platforms, using each platform’s automated solutions in order to retain oversight of their entire project.⁴

This is not to say “DIY” music and other kinds of amateur or non-professional music practice have merged entirely. DIY, as I have described in previous chapters, depends on complex notions of authenticity, and still has a specific (if flexible) ethical framework, meaning that even in the light of these changes, the majority of independent musicians would not refer to themselves as “DIY”, and neither would they be recognised as such by the DIY practitioners I interviewed. But these three changes brought about by platform capitalism — bringing the “reservoir” into the digital economy; placing big labels and independent practitioners on the same platforms; allowing practitioners to oversee an automation-heavy start-to-finish process — mean that doing it “yourself” is increasingly viable, and as a result there are new ambiguities within DIY about what doing it “yourself” might mean, and whether it carries any meaningful sense of alterity:

Interviewer: So, would you call your practice ‘DIY’, in terms of all your musical activity? Is that a label you have used, or is it one you’d feel comfortable using?

P17: *To be honest not really, it’s not something... I would never say ‘I’m in a DIY band’, or ‘I enjoy going to DIY spaces’ or whatever. But it seems like... we*

⁴ There is also some evidence that platforms are moving towards simplifying and automating increasingly more “creative” territory. For example, LANDR provides automated mastering services, something generally considered to be a highly specialised and *embodied* craft (prized mastering engineers are said to have “golden ears”). The results are of questionable quality but nonetheless offer an affordable and efficient alternative to the “real thing”, and their close partnership with digital distribution service TuneCore (which distributes independent releases to streaming and digital stores like Spotify and iTunes) suggests an impetus to reposition this time-consuming craft as a one-click, cloud-based process based on proprietary technology.

record all our own music, we go to a practice space that's run [by someone who is] pretty DIY [...] and I dunno, like, if that's DIY then I guess that's it. Like, it's hard to work out how you'd be anything else when you'd just started a band, if you know what I mean?

The first half of the response here gestures towards the emptiness of the “DIY” label, which the second half then explains: who *isn't* DIY, at least to begin with? DIY feels less like a choice, or an alternative, and more like a default position determined by the musical and digital landscape:

A whole load of people are talking about DIY in this way, that it is just about literally doing it yourself, like what does 'doing it yourself' actually mean, like, writing your own letter to the record label? Is it that? Like, driving to meet the record execs yourself, not getting a taxi? The very minimal amount of what you're doing, how independent you are... yeah, it gets used as the word independent. This is the problem, cos now DIY means something different to what it used to, it used to be a lot more about politics. And what I mean by independence is like, well everyone's independent now cos there's no real major labels so... you've got to be independent, but that doesn't mean you're DIY in my definition of it. (P12)

This quote, which echoes common feelings amongst older practitioners, suggests that DIY is going through something of a crisis of meaning. Since there are “no real major labels” (an exaggeration, of course), DIY activity is no longer seen as a useful measure of whether a band is careerist or self-serving. The term itself is used to cover a wide range of “independent” activity, even when there seems to be no “political” intent behind it.

'We did it ourselves... we wanted to be more popular, we did it ourselves' ... it's like, you can do everything yourselves, can't you: if you create your own success, then that by its own merit could be DIY, couldn't it? But in a way all you're doing is what everyone else has to do to become a success in music, which is create your own foundation, until someone's interested in what you're doing, comes in and helps you out. You know, and that's justified help cos you've earned it, and you can see that you have some kind of foundation that is worth exploiting or worth someone else coming in and investing in. So you're DIY up until that point until you're not anymore, but really the end goal was never to... the end goal wasn't self-sustained, it's success and popularity to whatever level, to whatever degree that you're after it. (P13)

The comparative ease of contemporary DIY was acknowledged by those practitioners with a long enough memory to remember pre-internet practice, or to have been informed about it by others:

If you go back even just a little further back than me, like if you talk to [the people] who I see as [...] the first people I knew who'd ever done anything like that... a far more extreme situation, you know: van with no seats, probably before it was illegal but pretty dodgy, and yeah, entire tours booked on the phone and you'd just end up in some really crazy situations, you know. Just as a result of not really being able to feel out what's gonna happen, and being so into the idea of going on tour you just agree to the shows anyway. Next minute you're playing in a basement, half a foot of water, all your amps on crates, and everyone into it and it's like we might all die, there's nine of you in the back of a transit van with just the two front seats, if anything happened you'd be dead. I don't think people, even the tougher side of people willing to tour and stuff, I don't think they'd be willing to go through that now. Even just booking it would be needlessly complicated, and then actually doing it would be incredibly hard work you know. (P13)

There is an element of nostalgia here, but nevertheless this inherited anecdote points towards the *materiality* of resistance, and suggests that there are specific ways that it should *feel*, in a corporeal sense as well as a psychic one. This links to previous comments in Chapter 4.2 on how DIY promotion “ought to be hard work”, and involve manually handing out flyers and putting up posters, rather than the immaterial and instantaneous creation of a Facebook Event page. The emphasis on “work” and physical activity points towards DIY’s specific signifiers of authenticity (discussed in Chapter 3), which draw on the valorized physicality of rock for their legitimacy, as well as an anti-Fordist emphasis on craft production.

Social media, and the internet in general, is of course not without its own forms of materiality. However, as David M. Berry notes,

the materiality of software is without a doubt, differently material, more tenuously material, almost less materially material. This is partly due to software’s increasing tendency to hide its depths behind glass rectangular squares, which yield only to certain prescribed forms of interactions. (2013, p.37)

If this is the specific materiality of social media, for DIY practitioners it is a materiality of *sameness*, in which significantly different political or cultural approaches have the same *feel*.

There is a distinction between DIY, and what I will call “platform DIY”, where the latter DIY is that aspect of practice which takes place using online platforms and other related digital tools, and which is activity undertaken by both DIY and non-DIY practitioners alike. It represents the portion of DIY which has become “easy”, and which therefore now constitutes standard practice for a far wider range of music practitioners, and a more straightforward “first step” for those practitioners who seek a career in the music industries.

So far in this section I have argued that the adoption of platforms by both DIY practitioners and a wider array of non-professional music practitioners means that it is increasingly difficult to separate entrepreneurial self-management from a more community-oriented DIY, at least as far as online practice goes. “Platform DIY” being the “default” option means that strategies of resourcefulness and refusal both fail to feel like resistance; the negative consequences here can be framed in terms of Fraser’s misrecognition, insofar as to “feel” resistant is a critical part of DIY identity, upon which practitioners’ capacities for self-realisation and communality rely. In the final part of this section, I will draw on Harry Braverman’s notion of “deskilling” to consider the wider *economic* consequences of “platform DIY”, and specifically its consequences for maldistribution.

For Braverman, Fordist methods of production reward a “scientific” approach to management, which tends to mean that the majority of workers, and their “doing” activity, are increasingly divorced from the work of “planning”, which is performed by a handful of specialist managers. This “deskilling”, aimed at rendering workers replaceable and production costs low, is for Braverman the fundamental role of management (1974, p.41). Scritti Politti’s resourcefulness therefore makes sense in an era of Fordist capitalism, in which taking oversight over the whole process constituted a radical reconnecting of “planning” and “doing”. Their pessimistic view of the cultural industries led them to see musicians on major labels as but one cog in the machine; their solution was to posit a system in which artisans retained managerial oversight, rather

than allowing their “doing” skills (in this case, music-making) to be subject to the “planning” of others. (The extent to which music production has ever been Fordist is questionable, since the cultural industries have long been required to adapt to more artisanal modes of production (Toynbee 2000; Banks 2007), but nonetheless it was owners and managers who found systematic ways of harnessing this activity, rather than musicians themselves).

In contrast, as expressed above, platform capitalism profits not through owning the product (i.e. the music), but through owning the data generated by the communication around the product; additionally, since they provide a home for the “reservoir” of creatives, they profit from the data generated by the best-sellers and the non-sellers alike (Anderson 2006). Thanks to this combination, there is no onus on platforms to push their users to be more efficient, i.e. to *manage* them into producing a higher quality or quantity of content, so long as they are getting the data they need — their efficiency contest is in being able to make more from the data than their rivals can. They thrive on a new kind of non-managerial organisation of labour, with an emphasis on individual responsibility. In this way platform capitalism seems to be particularly well-suited to benefit from the move from “societies of discipline” to “societies of control” (Deleuze 1992), in which subjects shape their behavior not based on threats from authority figures, but based on internalized goals and fears.

Whilst self-exploitation and self-blaming are significant consequences of this approach (documented in Chapter 5), it is necessary also to acknowledge the potential for empowerment. There are new skills being learned by contemporary DIY practitioners, not only in terms of project management, but also in gaining technological know-how and the ability to traverse new immaterial economies. How best to decide what the trade-off is? Why might Braverman’s “deskilling” be relevant here, in an economy that seems to bypass managerial strategies entirely?

Crucially, Braverman’s understanding of “deskilling” centres not on attempting to qualitatively compare skills lost and gained, but on the *relative* values of these skills in relation to the wider economy, and the impact of deskilling (and new technology) on the division of labour and wages under capitalism. Deskilling is not about lamenting a loss of skills in the abstract: the important thing is whether the distribution of skills in labor

processes tends towards *averaging* (i.e. creating greater equality in the work force), or whether it *polarizes* those whose time is “infinitely valuable” and those whose time is “worth almost nothing” (1974, p.58). Deskilling is bad, then, because it renders most workers easily replaceable, thereby keeping wages down, and excessively rewards the skills held by a select few.

This helps us to understand that the issue in the contemporary situation is not automation *per se*, or the hiding away of complex technological process behind user-friendly interfaces (which has some wonderful and empowering consequences), but the tendency for platform capitalism to, thus far, concentrate power in the hands of the few capitalists who own the platforms, and for network effects to create monopolistic relationships in which users *need* platforms. Users are therefore in no position to effectively bargain for a greater share of the economic rewards that are being collectively produced. “Platform DIY” is not culturally less resistant because “everyone is doing it”, or because it is “easy” — in fact, these qualities represent the significant upsides offered by automation. It is less resistant because the mass usage of platforms constitutes a large-scale gifting of data to a handful of monopolistic corporations, financially rewarding the few at the expense of the many. Platform DIY, like the platform capitalism it operates within, increases economic maldistribution and impedes efforts towards achieving social justice.

7.3 Optimisation and social media

DIY music scenes have historically been ambivalent towards growing their audience. DIY practice has involved opting-out of many of the “norms” of music industry promotion — refusing mainstream press, refusing advertisements, and demonstrating an unwillingness to frame their activity as a commercial venture. However, a more aspirational approach, as chosen by post-punk bands like Gang of Four, has also carried a sense of cultural resistance — seeing growth as the opportunity to claim the landscape of popular music in the name of democracy. Whilst these two approaches have different aims, they both carry an understanding of their actions as in some way political.

In this context, I want to highlight the emergence of a logic of *optimisation* in DIY music, the key tenets of which I elucidate in this section. I will begin by arguing that in a few important ways, optimisation is compatible with DIY practice and ethics. Optimisation allows for an ambivalent relationship to marketing, presenting itself as common-sense best practice rather than any kind of cynical strategy. By positing agency as belonging to the audience, rather than to the practitioners, it suggests that optimisation is about making sure users are able to “discover” content for themselves. Optimisation also intertwines with “algorithmic thinking”, meaning that practitioners aren’t misleading or mollycoddling their audience, but are instead attempting to position themselves optimally within platforms, allowing users to find music that they would *already* enjoy. I then argue that optimisation furthers the sense of activity being future-oriented (rather than enjoyed in the present), placing a focus on accumulation that is compliant with platform capitalism. I also argue that whilst DIY ethics impose limits on optimisation, in general it tends to increase the kind of problematic self-representation discussed in the previous chapter.

The notion of what constitutes marketing, and what is simply communication, is complex and ever-changing. For some DIY practitioners, the idea of self-promotion felt seedy and unethical to the extent that it was anxiety-inducing. One participant described attention-seeking as

the self-aggrandising Achilles’ heel of putting anything out there, the idea that you’re sort of saying, ‘look at what I’m doing’. Essentially you’re trying to reel people in but on some level that’s arguably unethical... it’s a weird one... like whenever I put out stuff, be it put on shows or put out cassettes... the channels that I use are generally channels which operate around just vocal conversation so just telling people about it verbally or via the internet. (P1)

The technique used here to avoid the feeling of “unethical” promotion is to utilise only those social channels that seem to be more “naturally” occurring. Similarly, many practitioners only posted about new music or events once (rather than more frequently) because they didn’t want to be “annoying” their followers.

Optimisation is well-suited to DIY because it bypasses such conceptions of what is “legitimate” or “illegitimate” promotion. This is in part because optimisation is a sliding

scale. A definition of search engine optimisation in the Oxford Dictionary of Marketing states that “basic optimization may involve nothing more than ensuring that a site does not unnecessarily become part of the invisible Web (the portion of the Web not accessible through web search engines)”, and that advanced optimisation may include “significant research into every element of page design, content messages, site structure, and off-the-page criteria” (Doyle 2016). I am primarily using it here to talk about the more “basic” steps, and moving away from SEO specifically to consider a broader logic. A logic of optimisation argues that there is little meaningful difference between “getting the word out” and “getting the word out *effectively*” (i.e. that they are both about avoiding “invisibility”), and this sense is exacerbated by the work of optimisation being comprised of myriads of small, seemingly insubstantial decisions. For example, genre tags on Bandcamp — which practitioners generally tend to fill in accurately with tags such as “indie” or “DIY”, and often “Leeds” — feels like cataloguing more than marketing, but also means the chances of being discovered are increased. This kind of optimisation is described here by a practitioner reflecting on deciding the best time of day to upload a new music video to Facebook:

I think that [knowing the best time of day to post Facebook updates] was just common sense to me, like I think it was maybe when we were putting up the video that we did, and it was like, we put so much effort into that video, I want as many people to see this thing as possible, so if I upload it at like midday when everyone’s at work, that seems pretty pointless, so if I upload it at like 6pm, everyone’s got home from work and is probably like on their phone or on their laptop or somewhere, and that just seems more obvious people are gonna be not at work then and stuff. (P27)

This practitioner was quick to stress that they placed no great value in social media attention *itself* (“I’m more interested obviously in people just hearing our music, that’s the main thing, that’s the reason we even have social media”), and that any “gaming” of the attention economy wasn’t done cynically but reluctantly (“I kind of think it’s all a bit rubbish, the fact that that kind of stuff matters [...] in the eyes of promoters”).

Tools of optimisation can act as a kind of knowledge transfer between platforms and users, giving over secrets gleaned from the platforms’ data mining in an attempt to shape user “norms”. This is often done through defaults — the default option will be the “best” one to choose — but also takes place through suggestions. For example, a pop-up

text box on Bandcamp suggests the optimum price to sell an album, based on their data of what prices have sold best in the past, and gives similar advice and information intended to put the artist in the best possible position to make sales. Facebook offers (often un-asked for) guidance on how to create posts that “perform better”. Social media usage creates a kind of common-sense optimisation, such as in one participant’s observation: “like, if you’re just putting up a random post, just put up a picture with it, ‘cos *obviously* people are more likely to interact with a picture than just a status” (P27). Access to metrics like Facebook and Twitter “Insights” then allow “obvious” knowledge to be confirmed and reinforced.

As above, these decisions are considered “common sense”, since the information is already-known, and therefore allows the enactment of a strategic, self-managerial approach to growing an audience, without falling into the more obviously problematic realm of marketing, nor having any of advertising’s connotations of cynical manipulation (or *creation*) of an audience. Assuming that the new song has to be posted on social media *at some point*, and therefore at some specific time of day, then it feels like a fairly small and unremarkable step to then ask: “*what time would be best?*”, where in this context the question is asked not in terms of optimal self-expression, but optimal engagement. In this way, the logic of optimisation reinforces the kind of reflexive self-presentation that, as I argued in the previous chapter, constrains practitioners in ways that are harmful for claims to recognition.

Another key characteristic of optimisation is that it emphasizes the agency of users (i.e. the would-be audience), and underplays the agency of practitioners. This in part due to the common understanding of the internet as something less constraining than traditional media. Unlike broadcasting or the printed press, where we have a sense of being “talked *at*” and “marketed *to*”, the internet seems to offer a myriad of choices; something that we participate in and shape in our own image, rather than passively receive (Patelis 2013, p.119). The (now rather dated) metaphor of the “information superhighway” captures this sense that the direction of travel is ultimately up to the user. Optimisation is about improving one’s chances of getting attention in an economy in which individual users are ultimately in charge, and can’t be *told* what to do, unlike the perceived ability of more conventional marketing approaches to “trick” consumers into changing their minds.

This approach has significant similarities with the “nudge” theory developed by behavioural economists Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein. The creators of nudge theory refer to their political approach as “libertarian paternalism”, which imagines well-intentioned institutions “nudging” users into the “best” decisions, without *forcing* them to choose, in a mid-point between libertarian freedom, and over-protective paternalism (Thaler & Sunstein 2009, p.4). Their influence has been substantial, with the UK coalition government setting up a “nudge unit” in 2010 to put forward policies based on the application of Thaler and Sunstein’s theory (officially named the Behavioural Insights Team, then later part-privatised and renamed Behavioural Insights Limited). Although Thaler and Sunstein caution against misuse of nudges, their approach assumes that those with the power to nudge might have a “paternal” interest rather than something more duplicitous.⁵ However, the ability to effectively “nudge” is dependent on a combination of scientific trial-and-error, having the capacity to access and analyse sufficient data, and being in a position to implement required change. Aside from governments, it is the monopolistic rulers of platform capitalism that are best placed to nudge, and controlled trials on Facebook (in collaboration with academics) have been noted and criticized by privacy advocates and researchers alike (Booth 2014; Jouhki et al. 2016). As with Frederick Taylor’s “scientific management”, the application of nudging is a specific consequence of technology put to work for capitalism, and resulting efficiency gains are likely to be skewed in favour of the existing dominant firms although, as highlighted above, platforms are willing where appropriate to share some of their findings with practitioners.

Bandcamp’s approach to providing this kind of optimisation-fodder epitomizes the hands-off libertarian paternalism of the nudge. Perhaps wary of scaring off the marketing-averse independent musicians that make up their clientele (as opposed to the more business-savvy “typical” SoundCloud user), their guidance on pricing for digital downloads is preceded by this caveat:

Please take what we’re about to tell you with a grain of salt. Part of what makes Bandcamp *Bandcamp* is that you, not some corporate behemoth, set your own

⁵ The copy of *Nudge* that I borrowed from a friend had been signed by Thaler with a dedication, which I took as containing a note of regretful hindsight, reading: “nudge for good!”

pricing. And that's really as it should be, since the most effective price just isn't the same for every artist, and you know your fans better than anyone. That said, we have the advantage of a metric crap-ton of data, and that data tells us a few things: [...]. (Bandcamp n.d.)

This is followed up with a guide to the best prices for “*most* artists” in order to maximally profit from downloads. The informal and self-aware tone taken by Bandcamp (e.g. the semi-ironic description of the platform as a “corporate behemoth”) is in keeping with the “hands-off”, relaxed approach that characterizes optimisation, suggesting that the choice remains in the users’ hands, and even anticipating some degree of distrust. This is exactly the “paternal libertarianism” of nudge theory: we know best, and it’s in your interest to listen to us, but you don’t *have* to.

It is tempting to ignore the ideological content of nudges and defaults as easy to opt-out of (platforms even admit as much themselves), and therefore relatively inconsequential, but this would be to ignore the key finding of this area of behavioural economics: users are particularly likely to do what they’re told *when they don’t think they’re being told what to do*. Optimisation and “nudge” theory both suggest that the best kind of marketing is to make the decision feels as though it is coming from the recipient of the marketing; the following paragraph on Bandcamp’s pricing guide highlights this philosophy neatly:

While we have your attention, we would like to discourage you from doing one-penny-off pricing (e.g., \$0.99, \$9.99, \$11.99). Though it may be an effective tactic for selling waterbeds, cell phone plans, and Angry Birds 34, when we see that sort of pricing on an artist’s own website, we do not think “gosh, this is a good deal” but rather “what we previously thought was a person/band is actually a marketing department, and they’re subtly telling us they think we’re idiots.” Present a straightforward price, let fans pay more if they want, and they’ll reward you. (Bandcamp n.d.)

On the one hand the anti-marketing rhetoric is counter-cultural: they understand that music is not a “waterbed” or a “cell phone”, distancing themselves from those cynical music biz parasites who only care about the bottom-line. They also suggest an ethical dimension: be straight with your customers and, happily, you’ll get a (financial) “reward” for your judicious approach.

Of course, the “we know you’re not a product” shtick is only possible because platform capitalism means their profits are relatively untethered from any given practitioners’ sales — whilst Bandcamp takes a 10% cut of all downloads, they are primarily interested in the growth of the brand as a whole rather than *your* individual success or failure. And, importantly, the avoidance of marketing (i.e. the penny-off approach) is not advised because marketing is a blight on society, but because it turns out it isn’t in fact the most optimal kind of marketing. In this way strategies of resistance (“I don’t want my music to be commodified”) are transformed into cynical gestures of alterity (“it is beneficial to *look like* I don’t want my music to be commodified”). Strategies of optimisation are used by platforms to “nudge” practitioners, and in turn by practitioners to “nudge” their audience, undermining communication in the name of optimisation; in this way capital subtly advances the proposition of money as the only unassailable guarantor of truth.

Another way in which optimisation retains compatibility with DIY norms is through the assurance that many strategies are not aimed at users *per se*, but at making sure practitioners’ communication successfully navigates the gauntlet of algorithmic hurdles that determine what content platforms allow onto users’ timelines and home pages. In this respect, optimisation coincides with what Bolin and Andersson Schwarz have termed “algorithmic thinking”. Writing on the subject of newspaper editors seeking traffic (and ad revenue) online, they identify that “the emergence of predictive algorithms affects sociocultural editorial norms, meaning that we are seeing an increased prevalence of cybernetic thinking, anticipating algorithmic success; a tendency that is arguably exacerbated – not dampened – by the editorial second-guessing provoked by the opacity of existing platform logics” (Bolin & Andersson Schwarz 2015, p.9).

Bolin and Andersson Schwarz’s findings are helpful in identifying two things. Firstly, that where practitioners want their content to reach people, they direct some elements of their communication *towards* the algorithms, since they are the first barrier to an audience, and this shapes the nature of what is communicated (Hallinan & Striphas 2014; Striphas 2015). And secondly, that since our understanding of what algorithms want is often patchy and poorly-evidenced (and in some cases deliberately obfuscated),

online content is also shaped by speculative attempts to meet *imagined* algorithmic criteria. Both of these consequences were observable in my practitioners' online activity, not usually in ways that meant significant alterations to content, but rather as a malingering and low-key influence:

We had Instagram linked to Facebook for a while [i.e. Instagram posts would automatically be pushed to Facebook], cos we felt like what was on Instagram especially at that time would have been of interest to Facebook followers, and I don't know how algorithms work particularly but we were noticing that people were liking the Instagram posts that were feeding through Facebook, that weren't liking the Facebook exclusive posts and vice versa, so I'm thinking if we're hitting different people then lets maximise our reach. If different people are liking different things cos I don't know whether that's an algorithm thing then let's do it. (P16)

The logic of optimisation argues that if decisions are made with the intention to “prime” or “game” algorithms, then it's not marketing, and involves none of the pernicious psychic manipulation associated with advertising. “Algorithmic thinking” also obscures the competitive element of gaming the system: the market is presented not as band versus band, but as each band fighting an individual battle with the algorithms. In actuality, of course, algorithms work as a content filtration system at the platform level rather than the individual level, and in seeking optimisation practitioners are really seeking an edge over their “competitors” in the scene.

The kinds of practices and strategies that I have considered so far in this section are not ones that my participants see as having a particularly strong political importance. As I have noted, they seem to be common sense, and they don't contradict DIY's anti-marketing stance, since optimisation emphasizes user agency and the well-intentioned need to “game” algorithms. However, I wish to argue that optimisation is a means of negating both resourcefulness and refusal, weakening DIY critiques by making marketing decisions unavoidable, and by encouraging practitioners towards capitalistic modes of accumulation.

One of the main ways in which optimisation achieves this is by encouraging a future-oriented perspective, in which social media activity is undertaken with one eye on what could happen next, and all successful present activity is celebrated for what it “builds”

towards. This practitioner is talking about the process of “setting up” a new band online — deciding where to host their music, and to what extent these decisions impact their trajectory:

You could either just put something on Soundcloud and be like, ‘hey, me and my friend wrote some songs, here they are’, or you could actually kind of establish... I guess it depends on where you’re aiming with the band. I’ve never consciously aimed at goals but I was very aware that actually we’re doing a band and the idea is that we will record more songs, play some gigs and that’s what we wanna do, so we may as well, let’s do this properly. Put the songs online and make it a band, give it a page and put a picture up or whatever, and invite our friends to like it, cos it feels like that’s the idea, ‘cos if in three months time we want to play a gig, we want to have enough people who might be able to see that gig is happening and know about it and come to it and that kind of thing. A lot of people said to me like, ‘I think you were shrewd in the positioning of the band’, and I... that wasn’t something that I ever thought about it. (P20)

Optimisation might be best summarised as doing things “just in case” — an understanding that success is unlikely, but that putting one’s self in a good position “couldn’t hurt”. It is a longitudinal approach that necessitates thinking about present activity through the frame of “what if?” (as in the above quote: “if in three months time...”), and acting accordingly. Online tools play a key role in facilitating this approach. In the quote above, the facilities offered by a Facebook Page — a fixed name, photo, to link friends to, and a place to accumulate Likes — are the extra-musical paraphernalia that constitute doing it “properly”. This is related to the concerns over self-branding discussed in the previous chapter, and as I argue there, the static and reified presentation of Facebook Page Likes and Twitter followers encourages this sense of permanently building towards a slightly bigger and better future.

Kuehn and Corrigan identify two motivations for (unpaid) “voluntary online production”; the first is peer recognition, and the second is “hope labor” (2013). The latter is activity undertaken in the hope that doing it for free now will result in paid work later, building one’s own reputation or portfolio in the anticipation of being recognized for it in due time. Kuehn and Corrigan argue that hope is not necessarily the primary motivation for their young creative practitioners, and aspirations towards paid work are sometimes “very private” or “far-fetched” (p.14), but nonetheless it works in

the favour of platforms who benefit from their unpaid entrepreneurial efforts. Whilst some deny the odds in order to convince themselves “it will pay off”, the majority do not see their labour going unrewarded as a “risk”, since the “pleasures of social production” are sufficient reward in themselves (pp. 18-19). This second approach is the closest to DIY practitioners’ and their relationship to optimisation — the majority of them were genuinely unconcerned about “making it”. Yet this doesn’t necessarily counteract the feeling that everything could be just *slightly* better than it is now: that 490 Likes today could be turned into 500 Likes tomorrow. Understanding the tension between present-day “pleasures” and future “hope” is critical to understanding how social media might shape subjectivity, and how it might create a deep dissatisfaction with the present, and thereby encourage the perpetual compulsion for more that drives platform capitalism.

This balance between present and future also points towards the ways in which optimisation strategies are limited by a need to conform to existing social norms, and how this prevents practitioners from being too gung-ho in their attempts to garner attention. Strategies which veer too closely towards promotion, for example, are met with disapproval:

Like I hate when people on Twitter, it’s bad Twitter etiquette, if they have an event they’ll tweet individual people like ‘this is happening’, ‘this is happening’, like the same event, it happens all the time, it’s such bad etiquette, and it spreads the word about the event but I don’t ever see it as being that successful really, I think it makes you look a bit desperate. (P16)

Negative feelings towards excessive posting and similar strategies are a reflection of online “politeness norms” — as with Baym’s early study of Usenet groups, participants do not want to create an unenjoyable experience for peers by being boring or irritating (1993, p.157) — and also consequence of DIY’s own ethical norms. Decisions about how to present one’s self online require the imagining of different audiences to be prioritised (e.g. “if a fan/peer/label boss saw our Page, what would they think?”). Attempts to address this “context collapse” (Marwick & boyd 2010) is in part what keeps the optimisation in check: the scene’s “moral compass” figures discussed in the previous chapter might be watching, and might disapprove. The need to keep pointing both ways, towards one’s present social relations and towards an aspired-to future, is a

limit on the extent to which optimisation can involve straight-forward marketing (and hence rely on the anti-marketing attempts to “look normal” discussed above).

But for the most part optimisation doesn’t really contradict “DIY”, at least in the sense of doing it yourself. As I argued in the previous section, DIY is in some senses highly compatible with platform capitalism, and the term “DIY” doesn’t begin to critique the notion of internalised self-management, or entrepreneurial self-sufficiency which helps platforms to thrive. If anything, it serves to legitimate them, with the emphasis on “yourself” positing a self-sufficient managerial strategy as preferable to outsourcing such work. Optimisation is specifically well-suited to DIY, then, insofar as it allows for the potential of growth without taking the more explicitly censured routes of advertising and third-party assistance. This demonstrates the extent to which, as Klein et al note, digitisation complicates notions of “selling out”, as marketing techniques are increasingly embedded within everyday practices (2017).

Additionally, these politeness norms are undermined by the fact that *optimisation feels like a personal choice*. It is difficult to find the *political* issue with optimisation (what is the harm, exactly, with thinking about the best time to post a song?), and therefore my participants across the board tended to see it as primarily a reflection of personal comfort levels, relating to different emotional thresholds for seeking or avoiding public attention (and the accompanying potential for public embarrassment), rather than something that might be ideologically *wrong*. Practitioners do form moral views on the basis of how much promotional work is visible (bands might be said to be “trying too hard”, or being “a bit *pro*”), but in general these will be kept close to the chest.

Optimisation doesn’t mean “wanting” or “seeking” success — it means letting success find you by being “in the right place at the right time”, and therefore maximising one’s chances of being “discovered”. But it also means that practitioners haven’t really *done* anything, in terms of decisions relating to audience growth. As in the above quote, when told they are being “shrewd”, the participant is able to argue that they “never consciously aimed at goals”. It also doesn’t necessarily imply that the practitioner has high expectations, only that they want to do slightly better than they are currently doing. The same participant emphasised that “there’s no part of me that ever thinks I’m going

to make a career out of making music [...] I'm aware of that. But at the same time I don't think there's anything wrong with wanting to do well" (P20).

In terms of cultural resistance, assessed using Fraser's model of "maldistribution" and "misrecognition", optimisation has a significant consequences. Firstly, by positioning the agency with the audience rather than the artist, optimisation removes some of the stigma of self-promotion, and simultaneously posits (the appearance of) non-promotion as its own kind of *optimal* marketing strategy. This has consequences on the ability to recognize one's self and others as "authentic", instead suggesting that social media activity is about impression management, and creating the right *perception* of authenticity. Secondly, Langlois argues that, on social media, "in order to retain the attention of users, the search for meaningfulness has to be never-ending, and any kind of gratification needs to be temporary or constantly delayed" (2013, p.54). The result is that resourcefulness is increasingly "put to work" for platforms, relying on compulsion and short-term desires rather than any long-term "building".

7.4 New resourcefulness, new refusal: future directions for DIY and cultural resistance

In the two sections above I have outlined how strategies of resourcefulness and refusal have both been partly negated by platform capitalism and by the prevalence of a logic of optimisation. I begin this section by briefly summarising how these two factors work in combination. The majority of this section is an attempt to articulate how new strategies might respond to challenges posed by social media in order to undertake cultural resistance that retains its capacity to counter societal misrecognition and maldistribution. I also integrate findings drawn from the previous three chapters, in order to conclude this fourth and final chapter of fieldwork analysis with some more holistic suggestions for future practice. I should stress, though, that my focus remains primarily on the present condition of DIY music as impacted by its *online* practice (including some offline ramifications of this).

Strategies of resourcefulness are undermined because practitioners don't own the channels of distribution — platforms constitute a newly enclosed sphere which means

that DIY activity isn't work "against", but work "alongside" exploitative corporations. "Platform DIY" contributes to deskilling (and thereby maldistribution), and encourages future-oriented promotions strategies of resourcefulness that are harmful to self-realisation in the present. Additionally, the purported neutrality of platforms and the all-pervasiveness of sharing discourse threatens to undermine feelings of resistance, something which is reinforced by the lack of materiality on offer in everyday practice.

A new resourcefulness, then, would involve constructing an alternative to monopolistic social media, and in doing so regaining control over distribution. It's important to acknowledge that DIY music has scarcely ever been about aiming to overturn entire systems of production, and therefore creating "a new Facebook" is almost certainly beyond its scope. However, it has managed at various times to construct a space where capitalism's dominion is less total, and DIY might take a similar approach today by attempting to ensure that Facebook and YouTube is less dominant online in the areas where it seems most pertinent — making sure that these platforms aren't the *only* places that bands are manifest online, that the music and the other important secondary artefacts of the scene are hosted elsewhere (especially important given platforms' increasingly all-encompassing terms of service), and that (cultural as well as economic) value generated by DIY activity is kept at arm's length from monopolistic corporations.

Such alternatives ought to be based on FLOSS (Free/Libre Open-Source Software) principles. In particular, the "free/libre" part is critical, since this identifies not only that the code is free to use, but also that it must remain free and open if it is to be re-used or adapted (Stallman 2016). It is the free/libre aspect (and the related notion of "copyleft") that distances open-source projects from the most nefarious kinds of "crowdsourcing", where the knowledge, content, or data generated by the collective is then brought back into private ownership and capitalized upon (see critique of Tapscott's "wikinomics" in Taylor 2014, pp.22–23). Google's mobile operating system Android, for example, is built upon open-source technology, but since there is no "free/libre" component to the licensing, Google are able to create their own "forks" (i.e. modified versions) based on the publicly-shared code, which they then make proprietary. The UK government's Open Data initiative similarly allows for both commercial and non-commercial use; its claim to be "opening up government" is in practice allowing private enterprise free access to a growing archive of public data. Any new DIY platform-building project

would need to be careful about where and when “free” data means a libertarian freedom to privatize and capitalize on the work of others.

Co-operatively owned peer-production online may seem to have had its day, since the more optimistic proclamations of its potential in the early 2000s failed to be borne out by evidence of such projects flourishing, Wikipedia excepted (Benkler 2006; Bruns 2008a). But the idea of platforms being publically owned seems to be regaining some momentum: Jeremy Corbyn’s Digital Democracy manifesto, launched in 2016 as part of his Labour leader re-election campaign, called for the development of “platform co-operatives” and the reformation IP law (Corbyn 2016); a recent *Guardian* article by Nick Srnicek called for the nationalisation of Facebook, Amazon, and Google (2017b); and Trebor Scholz’s academic and public-facing writing reaches similar conclusions regarding the benefits of collective ownership (2014; 2016). Given that nationalisation is beyond the scope of DIY practice (although it might be lobbied for), co-operatives would seem to be the more practical approach. However, the difficult faced in that instance is that same as that identified by Rosa Luxemburg over a century ago: namely that “small units of socialized production within capitalist exchange” are to a large extent bound by the pressures of competing within the market (Luxemburg 2006 [1899], p.47)

This is evident in the problems faced by existing attempts at creating non-profit music platforms, which tend to be hampered by this necessity to offer a viable alternative to both producers *and* consumers. For example, Resonate, which is a music streaming platform co-operative — tagline: “This is democratic capitalism” (Resonate n.d.). The business model as outlined on their website appears to work out better for both listener and musician, but the admission that “we have no way of knowing exactly how this will actually break down” suggests that their pricing strategy has yet to be proved in actuality (Resonate 2015). And since, to date, Spotify is yet to make a profit and only survives thanks to substantial venture capital funding (Christman 2017), it seems unlikely that attempting to undercut them without that financial support would be viable.

In considering how an alternative to monopolistic platform capitalism might be constructed, it is worth considering why viable alternatives seem absent thus far (or at

least, why such an alternative hasn't been successful within DIY circles), since these issues would need to be resolved in order for a new resourcefulness to be feasible. One practitioner here is attempting to answer that question:

I guess if there was a kind of non-profit, open source video streaming service, we would all use it. And I guess it's about what people put their energy into creating, and what's seen as having value. Cos I guess Wharf Chambers was set up because sufficient people wanted to set up a workers co-op bar that met these needs so they worked towards it and found a venue and set it up and now it's running successfully. And I guess maybe that's something that's seen to have more value? Or maybe more glamour? [...] Whereas whilst there's also arguably a need for open source, non-profit software to share music, I dunno... that's not gonna get you dates. That's not gonna get you a really good social life, is it? Or, you're not gonna get a wage from that. So that's why people in our community aren't working towards doing that. And it could also be about the skills required I guess. not saying that it's not a skilled profession working in a bar, but it's very different to the specific computer skills you would need to try and create an alternative to YouTube. (P9)

There are several important points raised here. Firstly, that technological work of this kind requires a specific and advanced skill-set. There are issues of unequal participation here, not just in terms of allowing practitioners to play an active part in building and maintaining a platform, but also in terms of developing the front-end usability that would make it a feasible option for those looking to distribute their music. There *are* existing open-source, non-profit alternatives to YouTube (LBRY, MediaGoblin), but they are sufficiently unintuitive and cumbersome as to not constitute an alternative in any viable sense.

Secondly, the above practitioner identifies the role of computer programmer as uncool, anti-social, and financially unrewarding. This lack of interest in coding-as-resistance, which was fairly widespread, highlights that it is essential for any platform alternative to be able to fully articulate its beneficial consequences for cultural resistance, and demonstrate the urgency of building better platforms. Here a solution from *within* DIY might involve using the scene's significant capacity to create symbolic meaning and bestow counter-cultural capital in order to make open-source coding feel slightly more exciting and more in keeping with DIY's own ethics. This might be achieved by emphasizing skill-sharing (like the existing DIY skill-sharing workshops), redressing

the tech sector's gender imbalance, understanding the harmful racial and gender biases that are reflected and reinforced in platforms' algorithms (Edelman & Luca 2014; Datta et al. 2015; Bolukbasi et al. 2016) and the ways in which platforms' emphasis on free speech and self-expression creates a problematic false moral equivalency. In order to present itself to DIY practitioners as "cool" (i.e. worth doing), any resourceful alternative would need to demonstrate the cost of using existing social media at the individual, collective, societal, and global level, and show the need for change as *urgent*.

If entire platforms are too difficult to build, or require more commitment than could be expected, then there are opportunities to resist on a smaller scale, and to build on the work of others. For example, electronic musician Mat Dryhurst's platform Saga, which allows users "full control over how your videos behave in each different place they're embedded online" (Dryhurst 2015). So, unlike YouTube and SoundCloud content that can be embedded within any website with or without your consent, using Saga means that if you don't like the context in which your video is shown, you can make it behave differently on that particular website. In highlighting this capacity, Saga re-presents the apparent neutrality of "sharing": being disinterested in how and where we allow our content to be used makes us complicit; Saga allows users to respond with a firm "no", rather than the tacit "okay" we give when using the usual platforms. Of course, Saga's functionality currently leaves something to be desired:

A sacrifice you make in using [Saga] today is that it is young. It doesn't yet resolve prettily on Facebook. It can be very buggy when viewed on mobile phones. It doesn't *just work*—yet. You may have to play with it a little to get what you desire out of it. When something "just works," ask yourself—For whom? (Dryhurst 2015)

However, as with the above countering of coding's "uncool-ness" by highlighting its political potential, there is an opportunity here to redefine the *materiality* that DIY has historically emphasized, and which is now seen as absent, by seeing the difficult work of coding as *embodying* cultural resistance. A future DIY resourcefulness would see coding as today's most appropriate materiality. The need to get one's hands dirty with code (rather than using something that will "just work") ought to be seen as politically analogous to the back-of-the-van materiality of touring in the 1970s and 1980s.

Any alternative would also need to acknowledge the extent to which platforms' current functionality provides significant benefits for practitioners:

I guess for me, in the same way that there's no such thing as ethical consumerism, we're stuck in this really shit capitalist society, where anything you make can potentially be capitalised on, and a lot of the free tools that we have at our disposal, things like YouTube or Bandcamp, the trade-off is that someone's profiting from them. And I guess for me that's a sacrifice I'm willing to make, but it's not ideal. And I think it's still... for me the fact we have things like laptops where you can easily set up a webcam and recording yourself playing and put in on YouTube, or record stuff on your computer in your bedroom and put it on Bandcamp and sell it to your friends, is ultimately really positive. And I think it's good to be aware of who else might be profiting from it, but I can't see a way to distance yourself from it without kind of, cutting your nose off to spite your face. (P9)

This echoes Mark Fisher's description of "capitalist realism" (2009), insofar as the participant acknowledges being "stuck" in the existing system: despite their "awareness" of the problems, it stills seems like the best of all possible worlds in the absence of viable alternatives. And, as noted above, they are right to identify the difficulty of creating an alternative which might compete with Facebook and YouTube in terms of functionality. But more than that, the above quote is a testament to the positive dimensions of social media that we might not want to lose — instantaneous mass communication, widespread access to creative audio-visual tools, and the capacity for collaboration and the exchange of ideas. These are the features that are at the heart of the early optimistic claims about Web 2.0 and social media's radical democratic potential, and the challenge is to build something that doesn't involve losing these beneficial aspects. This also emphasizes that there is no "going back" from platforms: whilst local music forums functioned as a decentralised home for DIY activity in the early 2000s, they would by today's standards be too cumbersome and inflexible to compete, and would involve an unnecessary repetition of effort. Platforms' great achievement is that they are built only once and provide space for all, and thereby permit, in Virno's terms, "a communality of generalized intellect without material equality" (2004, p.18). Any new alternative must take this "communality" as its starting point.

The other difficulty raised by the quotes above is how to leave these existing platforms when the cost of leaving is currently so high. Langlois argues that “for-profit social media are just too much a part of our lives for us to do without, and too complicated and expensive for us to construct alternatives.” For many of us, our friendships and relationships are so embedded within the platforms that boycotting or “giving up” platforms would mean “missing out, quite literally, on our lives” (2013, p.52). However, this problem contains its own solution, in that the truly irreplaceable part of social media is *the social*.

So, if these issues could be addressed, a FLOSS platform might redress issues of maldistribution, and even have a limited capacity to look beyond the “higher-order” of capitalism (Deleuze 1992, p.6) and towards the global production chain that supports our online lives. However, I have done little so far to argue that FLOSS platforms might help to counter *misrecognition*, since there is scant evidence that it might do so. For starters, as mentioned above, there is tendency towards coding-based meritocracy, with a small proportion of users doing the majority of the work (Crowston & Howiston 2005). And, in existing open-source projects, a major motivation for unpaid development work is the hope of paid work later (Hars & Ou 2002), in much the same vein as the “aspirational” or “hope” labour found on bigger platforms (Kuehn & Corrigan 2013; Duffy 2015).

And, arguably more importantly, there’s also no guarantee that open-source platforms would be radically different in terms of the features they offer, and the kind of subjectivity they are built to enable. The most successful attempts at open-source social networks tend to stick closely to the features found on successful proprietary platforms, and which therefore are understood to be (explicitly or implicitly) “demanded” by potential users. As such, any negative consequences for recognition arising from the architecture of the platform are likely to be recreated in an open-source equivalent. Hui and Halpin ask provocatively:

If Facebook, as the predominant example of a centralized digital social networking platform, is to be considered the apex of the industrialization of social relationships, can users escape their reduction to social atoms by simply decentralizing Facebook? (2013, p.107)

They argue that the specific subjectivity formed by social media is primarily a consequence of the network itself, and its manifestation of the social as an accumulation of connections between nodes, and therefore that public ownership wouldn't necessarily bring about substantial change. Berry argues that this "encourages users to think of themselves as a set of partial objects, fragmented 'dividuals', or loosely connected properties, collected as a time-series of data-points and subject to intervention and control" (2013, p.44).

What might a FLOSS platform do for claims of recognition, in the context of DIY music, that that existing dominant platforms can't (or won't)? Especially given the fact that we know there is much that it probably *can't* do, in terms of user-friendliness and size of its user-base. Critically evaluating networks is of value, but much of the theory dealing with these issues is operating at a high level of abstraction, and therefore some of the calls for "counterprotological code" (Galloway & Thacker 2007, p.100) seem a long way from anything that might feasibly be acted upon. However, there may be some more immediate strategies worth exploring.

One significant change might be adopting a "free/libre" approach to copyright and ownership which extends not only to platform architecture, but also covers the music (and other content) that is distributed through them. In terms of the "free" aspect, participants at present don't much care whether people download their music without paying. This ought to be understood in part as a result of applying DIY ethics (music should be accessible and affordable), and in part as a specific condition of the attention economy (permitting free downloads is better than no downloads at all). But in terms of the "libre" aspect — permitting and even encouraging the continued usage and re-making of the work — there is less interest. Bandcamp currently offers Creative Commons licences, so that music can be clearly labelled as "some rights reserved", allowing room for others to re-interpret and engage creatively with these recordings. However, almost all of the practitioners' Bandcamp pages that I looked at were marked as "all rights reserved", meaning that the standard copyright laws apply. It is important to stress that this more communal approach would not necessarily preclude practitioners seeking to make a living from their work (especially since music revenues are increasingly divorced from selling ownership of recorded music), but it would allow potentially for a powerful move away from seeing recorded music as private property,

and towards DIY as a creative commons — clearly distinguishing it from the current “platform DIY” identified in section 6.2.

Eric S. Raymond, writing on open-source coding practices, uses metaphors of the cathedral and the bazaar to consider two different methods of distribution, where the cathedral symbolises knowledge kept private and periodically shared, and the bazaar symbolises knowledge that is always-already public (1999). This is useful in thinking about the ways in which much of social media activity is not “sharing” but “hiding” — keeping something as one’s own until the point at which there is value to be gained by making it public. Existing strategies of optimised attention-seeking are premised on this calculated retention of information: the building of hype when someone is about to “drop” new music; stockpiling photos in order to post one per day; in this way exacerbating the future-oriented, risk-averse character of DIY music today. Examples of existing bazaar-style music-making are problematic insofar as they tend to be folded back into private ownership (Morris 2013 on Imogen Heap’s “crowd-sourced” album; Roig et al. 2014), and it must also be acknowledged that collaborative online production has the potential to exacerbate problematic dimensions of communicative capitalism — i.e. the compulsion to be reflexively “seen doing”, and the sense that nothing has really “happened” unless it is witness by others online. I am not calling for complete transparency as a means of creating collectivity, since there is no evidence to suggest this would be the result — the new block-chain technology offers complete transparency, but seems almost certain to be used in order to make sure copyright holders get the money that is “rightfully” theirs (Bartlett 2017). Rather, I am arguing for an assessment, based on the aims of social justice, of the ways in which what we over-share (in terms of surveillance and data collection) and what we under-share (withholding information in order to maximise value) are both built on a capitalist logic that is not in our own best interest.

In thinking about building alternatives, it is important to remember that even relatively recently the free exchange of information online, unfettered by copyright restriction, seemed to many like an inevitability. Peer-to-peer file sharing was near-enough a banal normality, before existing media giants stepped in, using their existing wealth and power to lobby for the re-affirmation and extension of copyright law (Vaidhyathan 2004; Prior 2015). Diane Gurman highlights the importance of “framing” in this

context, where moral codes are applied in ways that suited vested interests, noting that “news stories since the passage of the CTEA [the United States’s 1998 Copyright Term Extension Act] tend to brand any unauthorized use of copyrighted material as “piracy,” seldom mentioning the public’s right to access information, and forgetting that copyright law also includes legitimate exceptions, such as fair use” (Gurman 2009). The “framing” of social media has been equally successful, even in the very term “platform” (Gillespie 2010; Gillespie 2017), and most powerfully in the use of “sharing” as a metaphor (John 2013; 2017) that piggybacks on the communal connotations of peer-production, without drawing attention to the question of what we are sharing with whom, and why. The challenge in building an alternative is to highlight the political and cultural implications of “sharing” as a metaphor, and create new spaces in which to practice *actual sharing*.

So, new strategies of resourcefulness might include building alternative distribution networks, bringing forms of co-operative and collective ownership that are already present off-line to social media, and taking control of “code” in order to emphasise the materiality of resistance online. However, there are elements of refusal that might still prove valuable. As I have argued in putting forward an understanding of DIY as in “tension” (outlined in Chapter 3.2), DIY music is unlikely to achieve a “final” form that counters the forces it currently “resists”. It must necessarily co-exist both against and alongside the music industries and the giants of platform capitalism, and continue to adapt and respond. New strategies of refusal might provide means by which to counter some of the difficulties discussed in the chapters above, and offer more “everyday” tools for carrying out cultural resistance.

As I have identified, existing strategies of refusal are often undermined on social media because platforms find value through circulation and data, rather than the specific activities which within DIY are demarcated as “productive”. It’s also unclear when data is collected, and therefore when and how one is opting out, or what the most effective strategies might be. Additionally, the sheer scale and reach of platforms seems to undermine efforts to refuse to participate, casting them as irrelevant and ineffective. Therefore, new strategies of refusal ought to focus not on the economic consequences of boycotting social media or disrupting from within, which are likely to be minimal, but

on rejecting the new forms of subjectivity created by social media, and the positive consequences for recognition of the self and others that might result.

So firstly, a new refusal would acknowledge that the sense of haste generated by social media is often something that primarily serves the interest of the platforms, reinforcing the specific temporalities of immediacy and newness — what Kaun and Stiernstedt call “Facebook time” (2014) — that support communicative capitalism. Additionally, we might conclude that to refuse to rush, and to give one’s self more time to contemplate, might have beneficial effects in terms of self-realisation. One practitioner used this kind of argument to explain why their band had only a limited social media presence:

I think people tend to, broadly speaking, make their best creative work when they have time to just, like, sit. Not even thinking about it or dedicating to it necessarily, just sit and be with themselves: the eureka moment is when someone, an intelligent thoughtful person who is dedicated to their craft, has that small pocket of time where they’re between inactivity and thinking about what they’re doing, and that’s when the inspiration comes. And it becomes more and more difficult to do that when you feel this constant need to prove that you ‘have done’ or that you ‘are doing’. which you know is a classic trap that people fall into on Twitter or Facebook. (P25)

The issue here is not with rushing *per se*, but in rushing towards something that is perceptibly an “outcome”. As with the “Slow University” movement (Treanor 2008; Mendick 2013), the political nature of the problem is in who determines what qualifies as an outcome, and the way the resulting pressures shape our activity. The challenge is to resist this outcome-driven approach, or to re-define outcomes on one’s own terms — something that I did find some evidence of in my fieldwork. One practitioner was recounting to me how much they had enjoyed “practicing” with some friends in an as-yet-unnamed band, who were playing together but had no plans to perform in front of an audience:

Interviewer: I wonder if at some point that becomes not practicing but something different? if you’ve got no shows on the horizon, it’s not practice is it, it’s something else.

P17: *Yeah exactly, it’s a case of just playing together and it’s also a really nice structured way to hang out with people and get to know people, cos you’re all,*

at least when you're presenting ideas, you're in a very vulnerable position I think, and I think that's a really nice way to bond with people. It's very supportive and collaborative and I realised that yeah, I'd never really felt that way before about being in a band.

Seeing music as “a really nice structured way to hang out” points towards a re-emphasis on the social aspects of DIY, and towards an experiencing of these moments in the present (rather than re-presenting them in the future). This might also involve a re-focussing on music-making as a specific and unique practice, with benefits to the self and to relationships that aren't offered by the new practices of self-promoting on social media. One practitioner felt conscious of the way the internet's compulsive pull might detract from music-making time:

So, I could beat my head against the computer constantly every night in the studio and be like, there's an endless list of blogs [to contact], I'll just do this blog... but then there's the guitar there, like well, but you're a musician as well, so why don't you do more of that, so the internet can be a gift and a curse, perhaps that's what other people have said to you, I don't know. (P16)

Several participants mentioned being grateful or relieved that a lack of phone signal or Wi-Fi connection in rehearsal or recording spaces — in some cases this is a deliberate choice — meant they were able to focus on the enjoyable and rewarding activity of music-making. Again, existing strengths of DIY can be brought into play here, particularly the scene's awareness of mental health issues (and how to offer support), and also how to create and use language to discuss these problems, where existing discourse seems inappropriate. The importance, as Mark Fisher identifies, is to identify and understand the extent to which mental health issues might have structural causes (2009, pp.21–25). In the context of DIY and social media then, often-expressed feelings like “FOMO” (fear of missing out) need to be understood as caused by the existing structuring of sociality (and, as a result, *collectively* experienced), rather than as the result of a personal failing.

Secondly (and relatedly), a new refusal would involve developing an awareness of the ways in which social media can shape subjectivity. This would include a close examination of practices related to self-branding, and an understanding of how feelings of pride and ambition might, in certain circumstances, work to support platform

capitalism and offer little reward other than an increased reliance on the platform as a source of validation (as explored in Chapter 5). Related to this would be an understanding that self-realisation is not always oppositional or resistant, and that enterprise discourse is largely antithetical to cultural resistance. Again, this is about connecting emotions that feel deeply personal to the structural factors which shape our everyday lives, and in particular the ways that social media validation and reward might play a part in this, as in this definition of “subjectivation” offered by Ganaele Langlois:

Subjectivation also means fitting within the logic of social media platforms through continuous status updates, accepting recommendations, clicking on links, etc., overall, through continuous use of the platform. Such good behaviors can be rewarded: if I invite other people to use a social media platform, then I can get bigger storage for my account or credit for purchases, and other perks. Subjectivation takes place when we are invited and encouraged to adopt specific modes of usership – ways of expressing ourselves, ways of valuing the informational logic of the platform and its recommendation system, and ways of relating to others. One of the biggest perks of being a ‘good’ user is to be recognized and seen by the rest of the network: the more I contribute on Facebook and interact with peers and accept lack of control over my own data, the more prominently my contributions will be featured. (2013, p.56)

I have already shown that DIY practitioners can and do resist the encouraged “specific modes of usership” — for example, Facebook Likes can take on a moral meaning that is specific to DIY (see Chapter 5). An awareness of the distance, where it exists, between the “encouraged” mode and “resistant” mode of usership is necessary if something like a “moral economy” (Kennedy 2016, pp.111–113) of DIY is to be able to continue to inspire interventions.

Thirdly, a new strategy of refusal might interrogate the new divisions, or lack of division, between work and leisure, and how changing conceptions of work and leisure time might impact on the cultural resistance offered by DIY music practice. Work and leisure have always constituted a problematic dichotomy under capitalism, with the demands of work leaving leisure often experienced as the compulsion to enjoy one’s self (often to excess), or the imperative to relax (in order to recuperate for work). Literature on “prosumption” points towards the ongoing erosion of work-leisure distinctions (Ritzer & Jurgenson 2010b), although it is the autonomist Marxist focus on

“immaterial labour” that makes a greater effort to capture the resultant impact on subjectivity. In their claim that immaterial labour is now so all-encompassing that “living and producing tend to be indistinguishable”, Hardt and Negri undoubtedly overstate the case (2005, p.148). However, my research suggests that the future-oriented perspective which characterises social media is a means by which DIY practice is “career-ified” — even if practitioners aren’t expecting (or wanting) a career in music, they nonetheless follow certain paths and routines of growth, with an emphasis on being risk-averse and maintaining a stable and branded identity.

A recent report on mental health within the music industry concluded that, in the current economy, “music making is therapeutic, but making a career out of music is destructive” (Gross & Musgrave 2016, p.12). There is a danger that, at its worst, DIY music involves all the self-managerial stress of a career in the cultural industries, with many of the same pressures of gaining and keeping attention, without the financial reward. Given that the odds of getting “work” from DIY are slim, and that the conditions of any resulting work are likely to be precarious and unhealthy, a new refusal might more explicitly reject the “rewards” on offer, in favour of enjoying the more immediate pleasures of sociality and an unfettered self-expression. In short, a new refusal might ask what DIY music would look like if we acknowledged that there was nothing to lose.

The final issue which might also relate to a strategy of refusal is an increased awareness of the environmental consequences of social media and data usage. Nick Srnicek suggests that “data is quickly becoming the 21st-century version of oil” (2017b), however, it looks more likely that the 21st-century version of oil will still be oil, and that energy companies will continue to exploit depleting fossil fuel resources at high cost for the world’s population (human and non-human), and particularly the global south, in part in order to sustain our internet dependencies. DIY has, both historically and presently, tended to be fairly unengaged with environmental issues. This is perhaps a consequence of having more in common with the modernist aspirations of post-punk than the romantic tendencies of folk and country — tending to see positive change coming through engagement with technology, rather than the avoidance of it. Additionally, those with progressive politics, particularly concerning issues of identity and recognition, are perhaps rightly sceptical of the prejudicial norms that might be

elided in the “back-to-nature” rhetoric of much environmental campaigning. However, a strategy of refusal might benefit from understanding environmentalism as part of a critique of global capitalism, and developing an awareness of how even the most democratic online platform might nonetheless, as a consequence of its contribution to climate change, be counter to goals of social justice.

7.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that DIY’s strategies resourcefulness and refusal are both undermined by platform capitalism’s data-oriented approach to value, and also by the logic of optimisation that is prevalent on social media. Therefore, a new resourceful DIY might focus on building alternatives platforms and tools with collective ownership; a new refusal might involve being aware of social media’s impact on subjectivity, community, and the environment. In connecting the issues raised within the four chapters of fieldwork, I hope to have provided some useful or thought-provoking material for DIY practitioners, in support of their continuing efforts to enact cultural resistance. In the next and final chapter, I will summarise the key findings of my research, and consider the implications for critical social media studies.

Chapter 8: Conclusions

8.1 Introduction

This short concluding chapter has two separate aims. The first section, 8.2, draws upon the findings from the previous four chapters of fieldwork analysis in order to relate those findings back to my primary research question. The second section, 8.3, outlines the contributions this thesis makes to social media studies, demonstrating how emerging key concepts in social media and critical internet studies might be supported, developed, and amended by my findings.

8.2 Platform DIY: Capture or resistance?

This thesis examined the impact of social media on DIY music's capacity for cultural resistance. But in attempting to reach some broad conclusions in this regard, it is necessary to acknowledge the difficulty in separating out those changes in the DIY scene which might be attributable to social media, and which might be more sensibly attributed to other, broader changes in culture and society. Whilst my historical case studies were intended to assist in negotiating this difficulty by offering a comparison between past and present, they also highlighted that acknowledging these broader changes is necessary in order to accurately determine social media's role.

Individualisation, for example, might be exacerbated by the internet's focus on self-presentation (Curran 2016, p.75), but is also part of a longer-term movement towards a "self-driven culture" (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2002, p.42). The privatization of the internet means that much of our day-to-day communication is in the hands of a few global corporations but, during roughly the same period, the UK Government also privatised the nation's postal service and telephone provision, as part of a wider embrace of neoliberalism by both Conservatives and New Labour. In terms of a politics of resistance, there has been a general shift in emphasis away from redistribution and towards recognition which, while valuably critiqued by Fraser (2009), has brought

substantial progress towards equality for minorities and historically oppressed social groups.

Social media, then, is just one moving part amongst many, and there are occasions when to attempt to separate social media from its wider political and social context would be a fool's errand. Nevertheless, in this section I attempt to summarise the main ways in which social media has impacted on DIY's capacity for cultural resistance, as well as where it exacerbates or alleviates other societal pressures. Following the model of cultural resistance that I outlined in Chapter 1, I address DIY's relationship to redistribution, and then to recognition, whilst acknowledging that these two aspects often exist in tandem. Having already devoted the last section of the previous chapter outlining future directions for DIY and the social web (7.4), I pay particular attention here to DIY's relationship to the music industries, which have historically been its primary antagonist.

DIY has, in the past, managed to create relatively small spaces and networks wherein distribution of wealth is more even-handed than elsewhere in the cultural industries, and where individual profit-seeking is de-emphasised and stigmatised. This is manifest in the form of record deals that don't exploit artists, ticket prices that are fairer to audience members, and (less frequently) co-operatively organised ventures. All of these approaches are still very much observable: DIY label deals are still usually based on a fifty-fifty split of stock (i.e. physical records), gigs are pay-what-you-can, Wharf Chambers is a long-standing co-operative venue with a national reputation as a role-model within DIY. But, whilst pay-what-you-can makes some concession to a redistribution of income based on ability and need, and co-operatives like Wharf try to work with a supply chain of ethical producers, it must be acknowledged that these pockets of activity are small-scale. The way that DIY has more effectively addressed the larger issue of redistribution in the past has been through a critique of the music industries, and in particular their practices of exploitation and commodification. That critique is now undoubtedly significantly diminished, and attitudes towards the music industries have mellowed substantially.

This change in DIY's perception of the music industries seems to have taken place within the last ten to fifteen years. Here, a practitioner with over a decade's worth of

involvement in DIY describes the process of signing with a large independent label (around five years ago) as an occasion where their ideas of borders between DIY and the music industries were assessed and re-evaluated:

It was such a big deal to sign to a label, you know. It was one of the most stressful things I can remember happening to me, within the context of being in a band. [...] It plagued my mind, cos I didn't know what to do, and I was like 'this is against everything I've ever done', but at the same time, you know, it's not so bad. You look at it like that. The music industry is a different place now, the fears I had then aren't the same fears, that you'd be manipulated or made to work in a certain way, that you'd have to deal with ongoing rejection from a label saying this isn't good enough, or you should do this. You don't see any of that now, or we don't, certainly I'm not exposed to it. (P13)

Their fears of “selling out” were assuaged by an understanding that the music industry that they had historically framed as an adversary was no longer the same beast. Whether it is true that label interference with its artists’ work has diminished is questionable, and beyond the scope of this study.⁶ This perception is perhaps influenced by over a decade-long narrative in popular and trade press concerning labels’ weakening position relative to technology giants — Napster, then Apple, and then YouTube and Spotify (a narrative critiqued by Arditi 2014). Relatedly, the internet has been presented as empowering artists, *also* at the expense of labels, who are depicted as the outdated and unnecessary go-between in a streamlined system of technology and creativity (Shirky 2010; Morris 2013). Rightly or wrongly, the general perception is that labels lack the kind of hegemonic power previously seen as having such a negative effect on both producers and consumers.

The industry, at the level that my participants encounter it, is highly fragmented, made up of small-scale companies and self-employed workers who don't seem to constitute *structural power* in any way. One prominent example of this fragmentation is the recent, widespread establishment of independent press and PR companies, who now take on the role of getting their clients coverage in online and print press (and emerging areas of exposure, e.g. premium placing on Spotify playlists), rather than indie labels

⁶ One producer told me that at the level of large indies and major label “indie” imprints A&R interference in the music itself is not uncommon, and usually concerns the removal of offensive language, requesting an extra chorus, or for the song length to be trimmed.

relying on an in-house promotional department. Several DIY bands I spoke to had experience with these small PR firms, often through the proxy of a small DIY label, and these firms don't have the connotations of being "in" the industry. PR companies offer no external instruction to change or standardise the music, and have no economic interest (save a small reputational benefit) in the success of the artist beyond the single project they have been paid for. The other predominant "industry" interaction in DIY, which is with professional promoters, is also most often with small, local companies with one or two full-time staff, and who, like PR companies, have no management or contractual control over bands. The fragmented landscape of the music industry means that DIY bands weave in and out of the industry without being controlled or owned by it.

The social web has played a role in this industry fragmentation, which is in part a consequence of the networked capacity of the internet — blogs and other music sites are overwhelmed by the amount of links they receive to irrelevant or inadequate new music, and so prioritise links from trusted PR contacts as a time-saving quality control method. But the bigger impact of social media on DIY's cultural resistance, in terms of redistribution, has been the normalisation of "do-it-yourself" methods within music culture, and therefore the separation of these methods from a DIY ethical framework (as discussed in the previous chapter). The DIY model of self-sufficiency and establishing a reputation without industry support is increasingly also the default approach of non-DIY bands looking to "make it", as labels wait longer before committing to bands, waiting to see if they can *do-it-themselves*.

In terms of redistribution, then, DIY's attempts to look beyond profits continue in spite of, rather than thanks to, social media platforms. The promised democratisation of culture simply hasn't materialised, and as big tech companies increasingly become media creators, their interest in copyright and "walled gardens" of premium content is beginning to outweigh their interest in granting free access and resources to independent producers.

When an older participant's definition of DIY carried an inherent critique of the music industry, suggesting that DIY was about avoiding the economic exploitation of one's

audience, they acknowledged, with a touch of sadness, that it was an outdated definition:

Originally I thought it was important not to be trying to become... not to put yourself in a position where you're compromising other people by your success, or something? So, becoming a successful band, which then means that people have to pay more to see you in a big venue, and maybe your CDs get expensive, or whatever, it feels like you're compromising your audience in some way. [...] But these are quite old-fashioned, I dunno, things have changed, I think. (P12)

The economic critique of the music industries has not entirely disappeared, as the continuing emphasis on not-for-profit practices demonstrates. But, certainly, definitions of (or “reasons for”) DIY given by younger participants hinged not on ideas of combatting and re-shaping the music industry, but on ideas of inclusivity, representation, and self-expression. Whilst these ideas are not new within DIY, their increasing importance reflects a turn away from redistribution and towards recognition.

Recognition as cultural resistance hinges upon an awareness that there are voices that are silenced, socially and culturally, and which therefore suffer injustices. It has to be acknowledged that social media offers new kinds of access for these voices. But in terms of music as communication, and as a means of being “heard”, practitioners now are not much better off than previously. Social media doesn’t give practitioners access to an audience; it gives them access to a *potential* audience — which is quite a different thing. Another real strength that social media seems to offer is in the granting of cultural autonomy. However, I have outlined some of the key ways in which this autonomy is offset. Practitioners are encouraged to make “sensible” decisions about growth and popularity. Platforms quietly make decisions for practitioners about “spreadability” which normalise particular goals.

Aymar Jean Christian, writing on self-expression on YouTube with a focus on queer people of color, notes the impact of the platform’s “marketization” (also noted by Burgess 2015), and asks “what happens when identities [that] corporations have not valued — the queerest, most ambiguous, and most difficult to define — suddenly have the opportunity to ‘market’ (i.e. create value for) themselves?” (2016, p.96). A marketisation of recognition has taken place through social media, and this particular

form of reflexivity emphasises relatability and popularity as the primary metrics of representation. Christian also notes that marketisation tends to increase the prevalence of caricatures of identities, particularly when the entrance of larger media firms means that individual creators are no longer in control of the “spreadability” of their message (2016, pp.106–107).

It should be stressed that this is not an issue that is limited to representation of marginal groups; it is linked to a more general commodification of self-expression, where being one’s “authentic” self is judged a success or failure based on the amount of reified attention one receives. As I outline in the next section, I don’t think the pursuit of wealth is the only cause of this drift towards relatability — social media’s reification of the social world is perhaps equally important — but there are certainly times when marketised recognition works in tandem with capitalism, by emphasising “visibility” and “voice” in ways conducive to competitive and individualist accumulation. And this marketisation of recognition also has significant consequences for DIY’s relationship to popular music. It positions pop stars as a superior embodiment of the people they represent, because they represent in ways that are bigger and therefore better. DIY in this context is a small version of the big time — a *small* act of representation where the aim is a *big* one.

Fraser argues that while there may be a handful of social injustices that might be caused by solely maldistribution or misrecognition, the vast majority would require remedies combining *both* redistribution and recognition (2003, pp.33–35). DIY has historically offered both an economic and aesthetic critique of popular music which highlighted both the injustices of maldistribution (under-rewarding artists, overcharging audiences), and of misrecognition (standardisation, lack of cultural and aesthetic diversity), and has understood these two issues to be interlinked. DIY’s shift towards recognition has brought a valuable awareness of a lack of diversity within its own scenes. There is still a great deal of work to be done in this regard. But social media’s marketisation of recognition posits self-expression as a competition for attention, and this competition threatens to dominate over giving voice to structural concerns. This imbalance might be countered by asking: how do the injustices of maldistribution and misrecognition operate in tandem, both within DIY and the music industries more generally? What

opportunities for self-expression and representation could DIY offer that are unique to its market-averse disposition?

There is a parallel between the trend towards relatability and Mark Fisher's work on "the uncompromising" in gangster rap, which he argues, through its focus on reflecting the harsh reality of "the way it is", also demonstrates the inescapability of neoliberal competition, and the impossibility of social change (2009, pp.14–15). Relatability seems to do something similar, in promoting a focus on the "real" — an authenticity premised on self-expression and closeness-to-life — at the expense of more abstracted and aspirational culture. Social media exacerbates this through its reification of recognition but also by demanding "embeddedness" (i.e. a close relation of "truth" between online and offline life), and encouraging specific kinds of "authentic" self. What this prioritises is a culture that is able to "speak" to the here-and-now, and to reflect the difficulty of our times. What is diminished is music's capacity, through its aesthetics, through its sociality, and through its economic organisation, to help us imagine and build another, better, world.

8.3 Contributions to social media studies

Whilst my research has considered the impact of social media on one specific music scene, I have also pointed towards some wider inferences for critical social media studies, and I re-iterate and expand upon those here. These contributions are primarily made to literature on affordances, on metrics and data, and on the branded self.

In Chapter 1, I outlined a critical conception of affordances as part of my methodology. I suggested that existing literature on ICT affordances had tended to under-emphasise the role of specific user-groups, and to over-estimate the role of the technological environment (c.f. Boyd 2011; Nagy & Neff 2015). I argued that this approach leads to a focus on universal (or near-universal) online behaviours — i.e. searching, posting, chatting — at the expense of studying how users utilise platforms in ways that are specific to their own sociocultural positioning.

The affordances identified in my fieldwork chapters support this specific user-group approach, by demonstrating the importance of DIY-specific ethical norms to the scene's online practice:

- Social media offers reams of demographic data to content creators (i.e. Bandcamp “stats” and Facebook “Insights”), but DIY practitioners pass up data mining, which seems to have no particular valuable application, in favour of “digging” for qualitative, personal connections (Chapter 5.2).
- Facebook and Twitter allow user-groups to reach each other quickly, with hyperlinks making short-lived connections between different scenes; the affordance of “rallying”, rather than bonding or bridging, emerges as participants take the opportunity to publicly perform solidarity (Chapter 5.4).
- By using Likes and comments tactically, practitioners find ways of “boosting” content from friends and colleagues, ensuring that they aren't lost amidst algorithms that prioritise paid content (Chapter 6.3).
- DIY practitioners tend to be sceptical of marketing practices, but the data given by platforms to users allows for “optimising” strategies which seem to bypass explicit promotion, whilst emphasising audience growth and exacerbating competition for attention (Chapter 7.3).

These affordances — *digging*, *rallying*, *boosting*, *optimising* — are all consequences of both the specific design of platforms *and* of the specific cultural norms of this user-group, and each demonstrates a quite different balance of power between the two parties. Sometimes, as with *optimising*, platforms have the capacity to effect behaviour change through rhetoric, knowledge transfer, and site architecture. Other times, as with *boosting*, platforms unwittingly allow users to be oppositional to platforms' commercial interests. Sometimes, as with *digging*, platforms and users are at reasonably amiable cross-purposes. And, sometimes, as with *rallying*, seemingly accidental network effects benefit neither party.

The full picture, then, even for this one group of users, is complex, with moments when power seems to be with platforms and moments when it seems to be with users, moments when they have shared goals, and moments when they are at loggerheads. Affordances, used in this sense of specific user-groups meeting specific technological

environments, can be helpful in identifying and assessing the political nature of these interactions.

Literature on the “branded self” argues convincingly that communication on social media is increasingly imbued with a promotional character (Hearn 2008; Senft 2012; Fisher 2015), reflecting a “promotional culture” that is pervasive both online and off (Aronczyk & Powers 2010). Alison Hearn theorises a distinct but related “anticipatory self”, which is characterised by a kind of flitting between the “is” and the “ought” (i.e. present and hoped-for future), and which again is a “general affective condition” beyond the internet (2017b). The connecting theme between these two posited “selves” is perhaps the emphasis on reputation building, and on a speculative future playing an important role in shaping present behaviour. This is to some extent borne out by my research, and I have suggested that the ubiquity of metrics plays a key role in this entrepreneurial self-construction (even whilst elements of it are resisted). But I also think that this emphasis on branding and reputation implies that users adhere to a universal, technologically determined set of aspirations and norms (i.e. always wanting *more*), and under-emphasises the extent to which communication on social media is intended to achieve rather more sociable ends.

Jodi Dean characterises online communication as “reflexivity all the way down”, which in her psychoanalytical approach constitutes a turn inwards, towards the self, as a means of coping with the decline of the “big Other” (i.e. sources of authority, such as institutions, which might have historically legitimated the “Real”). But it seems to me that we don’t look to ourselves, or to our future, for validation anywhere near as much as we look to others. Arvidsson’s neat phrasing, “socially recognised self-realisation” (2008, p.332), expresses this concisely, although I would suggest that the “social” and the “self” in this formulation might be swapped around: it is about seeing (i.e. *recognising*) one’s self being “realised” through social interaction.

Communicative decisions which might be framed as promotional or reputational are often better understood as evidence of this kind of social reflexivity. Take this participant’s description of the process of conceiving of, writing up, and deliberating on a tweet:

I don't want to offend someone by saying something stupid. Like the other day [I saw something funny], and I thought, this is funny, I'll post about that. And then I thought, is it funny? Is it weird for a brand to post about that? [...] I don't want to create a [weird] image, I don't want to be that guy, and I got really nervous about it and then someone liked it and I was like phew, validated. (P14)

The ambivalent wording (“I don’t want to be that guy”) points to the complex relationship between self-expression, relatability, and subjectivity. Would an adverse reaction to the tweet *make* them “that guy”, or would they have always-already been “that guy”, albeit unrecognised until now? Does being perceived as “that guy” by others mean that one’s self-perception would be similarly redefined? And it is notable, also, that validation is framed in negative terms as the avoidance of being (identified as) offensive.

The main concerns here — embarrassment, awkwardness, insecurity — are quite different to a brand’s concerns with symbolic coherence as a means of making profit, and I think we need to be careful to maintain this important distinction. There is a danger that if we see all activity as contributing towards “branding”, then we are guilty of the same cynicism that we seek to identify. Whilst it is true that a kind of promotional and anticipatory character is often predominant online, social media at this level — hundreds of followers, rather than hundreds of thousands — also reflects social desires and fears that belong to us as individual, unbranded humans. The enjoyment gained from receiving Likes, Retweets, and so on, is not derived from a notion that it they might contribute towards a larger brand-building effort, but is premised on the small, swift thrill of successful communication — just like much of our offline communication with friends and colleagues. The issue is that, unlike the diverse, subtle array of vocal and bodily cues we are given offline, on social media we have to judge our success based on feedback mechanisms that are crude and blunt, and which are coded by corporations who have a vested interest in exacerbating, capturing, and commodifying our compulsions and insecurities.

No surprise, then, that social media activity by individual users is largely characterised by hesitancy. Practitioners ask “*should I... ?*” — should I post, should I share, should I reply — and in this moment, they aren’t asking “is this on-brand?”, but rather, “*is this me?*”, and positioning social reflexivity (often through metrics) as the primary means of

answering that question. The more that social media usage is embedded into our daily lives, the less likely we are to take communicative risks on these platforms. Ysabel Gerrard notes, therefore, the continuing value of “disembedding” social media from our “real”, everyday identities, arguing that pseudonymous accounts give more space for users to enjoy their passions (e.g. trashy TV) without the risk of being embarrassed (2017). This is perhaps the paradox at the heart of “networked individualism” (Rainie & Wellman 2012, pp.124–125); as individualism increases online, many of us rely evermore on society to affirm our individuality. Social reflexivity increasingly seems to hold us in place in ways which are beneficial for platforms who seek accurate data for targeted advertising, but which limit possibilities for self-realisation.

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