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The Show Must Go On: New York DIY as Cultural Practice in The Changing City

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New York DIY as Cultural Practice in The Changing City

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by
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ABSTRACT

The New York DIY scene is situated in a long history of social, political, and musical movements across the nation. Coming from this tradition of "do it yourself" politics, this community has adapted over the years to combat the forces of gentrification and capitalism which constantly threaten DIY music scenes. Over the last two years, this community has faced one of the most unexpected challenges to the continuation of the scene; The COVID-19 pandemic. In this ethnographically inflected analysis of the New York City DIY scene, I will be looking at the ways in which this musical community has been affected by the pandemic and gentrification. Furthermore, through an ethnographic investigation of how DIY has persisted throughout the pandemic, I will be looking at what this might mean for the creation and continuation of this youth subculture. Theoretical and historical conceptualizations of gentrification are applied to these encounters to analyze the sonic qualities of gentrification, as well as what it means to people in the scene to be from New York. In applying a historical framework, this study also looks at the cyclical nature of youth reactionary politics, as well as consumer capitalism's ability to co-opt aesthetics of youth counterculture. A transgender studies lens is also applied to DIY, as a way to understand how this community defines what DIY is, and locates the act of "doing" as the practice which counters the sounds of gentrification in the scene. Through this hybrid of ethnographic, theoretical and historical analysis, I aim to situate the New York DIY scene in traditions of DIY and punk aesthetics in order to think about what is possible for the future of this community in the face of adversity.

For the New York DIY scene. Thank you for giving me a community I didn't know I needed, and for being the reason I am still here. Without you, I would not be who I am today.

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Introduction

New York City has been viewed as a hub of cultural innovation in the arts for much of its history. Home to prominent institutions like the Metropolitan Opera House, Carnegie Hall and the Juilliard School, to name a few, the New York metropolitan area is steeped in a rich history of what can be considered "high art" and music. Those aforementioned institutions cannot exist further from the world that sits at the locus of my research. Existing a mere train ride away in the boroughs of Brooklyn, Queens and the Bronx, one can find a wide variety of venues and DIY house spaces. You just have to know where to look. These venues are the ancestors of a long line of small-scale venues that have become the home to the youth subcultures of New York Cities underground music scenes. It's difficult to pinpoint an exact date and time period when shows and venues like this appeared on the scene. Some can point to jazz clubs and impromptu jam sessions between jazz musicians, while others may reference the early punk and No Wave movements of the 1960's and 70's. Disregarding historical accuracy, it is safe to say that small scale musical performances and performance spaces have the ability to make a large-scale difference in music, musical scenes and the social relations which exist around them.

As a teen growing up in Brooklyn in 2015, I heard a lot about DIY venues like Silent Barn, where at any given day one could find a wide range of musical performances. A lot of the times they would host indie, hardcore and punk bands, who were either local or touring bands. The halls would fill with people of all ages looking to hear the newest sounds and mosh in a sea of fellow concert goers. However, I would not be able to join them until 2018, my freshman year of college. As a younger teen, I was generally a very respectable and studious kid, who took my parents direction very seriously. Because of this, when my mom told me I wasn't allowed to join my friend David at these shows, I listened to her. Instead, I lived somewhat vicariously through

my friend David's descriptions of what he had witnessed and experienced at these shows, longing to one day be able to be a part of them. Little did I know that one day this music and the people involved in it would become such a big part of my life.

In December of my freshman year at college, I attended my first "show", a DIY concert that my friend David's first band, Big Titty and the Big Titties, was playing in. The show, was an album release concert for Denis T.'s album, I'm Really Great Inside, featuring a talented lineup of some of the local bands and acts. Going there, I was riddled with nerves, remembering all the times my mom told me I couldn't go to these shows because they were in a "bad neighborhood". I continued to dwell on what she meant by this on the train ride there. Was it because of crime rates she may have seen on the news, or maybe because these shows are often in predominantly black/POC neighborhoods that have gentrified pockets? Regardless of what amount of underlying prejudice colored her past comments, I trekked on into the night, transferring trains to get to the other side of Brooklyn. I remember this space like it was yesterday, a second-floor apartment in Bushwick, decked out with blue and purple lights, and a wall of graffiti behind the drum kit that would serve as a backdrop for the performances. The show itself, and every person I met there filled me with deep joy. This night inspired my love for the people, music and places I would continue to encounter through the years. However, this ethnography is not about that time.

Fast forward in time to the present, three years and one global pandemic later, I couldn't feel any more distant from this scene than I do now. While the physical distance between Annandale and New York City has always been difficult it was never undoable. The consequences of COVID-19 have caused this distancing between myself and the scene which had welcomed me with open arms. When the first major outbreaks of COVID began in

Manhattan, I knew that some things were about to change, but I had no idea how extreme these changes would become. In the blink of an eye, all of our lives, our social worlds and communities were forced to be isolated and go indoors. All of our plans were put on hold as we now had to reckon with a deadly virus that we knew very little about. Like so many other things in our world, live music in all of its forms were put to a halt. While this had an effect on all facets of live music performance, it safe to say that large-scale music industry venues like Maddison Square Garden weren't going anywhere. However, my mind instantly went to the DIY and underground venues whose lives were already at risk due to the relentless force of gentrification. I wondered if they would even stand a chance against the social and economic affects that a global pandemic brings to the table.

In the beginning, bands that I knew, such as Big Pity and Griffy Jones and The Phantom Band, were quite active on social media. They participated in the onslaught of livestreamed shows and events, one band even collaborating with fans to create a "quarantine music video". The music video was for one of Big Pity's most popular songs Boom Dadada, and featured short clips of fans and friends dancing to the song, which were then stitched together to make the video. Events and projects like these helped to continue a feeling of togetherness for our community, even as many of us were now separated by considerable distances. However, as we soon found out, technology can only do so much in a musical world whose ethos comes from a long tradition of visceral live performances, legendary stage presence, and high energy mosh pits. The general sentiment of longing for human contact that we all felt shortly into the worldwide quarantine was especially felt by all those who frequented these shows, and found a home in them.

Writing now, in a time where we have access to vaccines and an expanded knowledge on how to handle the Corona Virus, there are some glimmers of hope for a return to the social life of music scenes that we remember. The question I am positing through this ethnographic study asks what kind of scene are we going to have left to return to. Even before COVID many of the venues and performance spaces that I frequented were facing the threat of second wave gentrification. This form of gentrification entails the displacement of the artists and young people who had initially moved to lower income neighborhoods in the city in search of affordable rent. Now, under this wave of gentrification, they are being bought out but large corporations who will most likely tear down the old buildings in order to build luxury apartments and large office buildings. Without these buildings and the different communities that once existed around them, where will DIY music scenes have to go?

This aforementioned wave of gentrification is nothing new, it happened in Williamsburg earlier in the 2000's. The once industrial urban center, home to many immigrants and tenement housing, this neighborhood has undergone an extreme transformation over the last twenty years. First came the musicians and artists, otherwise known as "hipsters". They brought a form of "subcultural capital" which quickly transformed the neighborhood into a hub of "underground" indie and DIY music. It should be noted here that subcultural capital is being used here as the term coined by Sarah Thornton, which is made up of knowledge of the scene, the use of its style and perceived identification with a scene, or social group. It is this cycle of gentrification that lies at the very core of my research. It is one of the main causes of displacement of both local communities and the artists who were trying to make a home in these communities, thus driving these music scenes further and further to the outskirts of Brooklyn. Thus, another question this draws us to, is what happens when there is no more space for these local communities and

artists? There are signs of hope, as there is a growing thread of different kinds of anti-gentrification movements and organizations which will be discussed in later chapters. However, for right now it is important to keep this cycle in mind going forward as it will color many of the conversations and topics in this study.

The combined forces of gentrification and the economic hardships brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic have caused a noticeable decrease in small DIY venues and performance spaces. So much so, it has led me to wonder how much COVID has sped up the process of venues shutting down. The financial hardships it has caused coupled with the overall social distance created by the concern for public health and safety has made it much more difficult to keep live music venues running over the course of the pandemic. I will be analyzing how the forces of gentrification and COVID-19 have impacted the New York City DIY scene as a whole, and what this means for this generation who once relied on these spaces for recreation, entertainment, and furthermore a sense of home.

In this paper I use a variety of historical, theoretical, and ethnographic analysis to study the relationships between the New York City DIY music scenes, and the effects that gentrification and COVID-19 have had on this scene. I will be exploring the ways that the aforementioned themes affect the creation and proliferation of these youth-oriented subcultures, which often provide these youth with a sense of belonging. Furthermore, I will utilize theoretical frameworks from areas of transgender studies to actively "trans" the venue, and the DIY music scene in general. Within this framework, I will show that the DIY aesthetics found in the scene and its venues perpetuate the practices of constant becoming embodied by these musical communities. Thus, these practices of becoming do not allow for the creation of rigid definitions of genre and identity within DIY. By the conclusion of this study, I will locate the figure of the

poseur as that which is in direct opposition to DIY practices. Through analysis of this figure in the field as well as applications of cultural theory, I will demonstrate that the ontology of poseur is implicated by the forces of capitalism (as well as cultural capitalism). In this way, I argue that the poseur poses one of the greatest social threats to DIY scenes. However, this study will also show the ways that DIY works to overcome this threat to the social life of these musical communities.

It is important at this junction to note the use of the term "practice" in relation to the community at the center of this study. Drawing from the theoretical lineages of Pierre Bourdieu and Michel de Certeau, practices refer to the actions of everyday life, such as walking, shopping, talking etc. Furthermore, as presented in the Oxford Dictionary of Critical Theory, these actions then become the "texts of everyday life", which are then can be made legible through analysis of their symbolic meanings (Buchanan 2018). Bourdieu furthers this, with his assertions that theory, "… often unconsciously and uncritically, determine the cultural practices of people's everyday lives" (Barbera, Payne 2010: 86). Applying these definitions of practice from the framework of Cultural Theory, this study will be analyzing how the actions of those in this community inform the idea of DIY as a practice of countercultural resistance. This practice will then be analyzed through theoretical frameworks which argue that this resistance, in the form of "doing", becomes the vehicle through which personhood and identity in the community continues to be redefined.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

This study on New York DIY scenes in the context of gentrification and COVID-19's impacts and its relationship to subcultural community building will be put into conversation with a variety of historical and theoretical texts. By putting this paper in conversation with these texts, it is my goal to place this scene in conversation with its predecessors, establish a definition of what it means for a community to inhabit a DIY ethos, and think about how the disappearance of small-scale venues pose a threat to these communities. In analyzing what makes up a DIY ethos, I will also present the argument for the mutability of the scene in the framework of transgender studies' theories of gender as constant transformation and becoming.

This study will first be put into conversation with historical and theoretical accounts of the history of punk and indie music. *Ryan Moore's book, Sells Like Teen Spirit: Music, Youth Subculture, and Social Crisis*, gives an in-depth account of the cultural evolution of punk and hardcore scene's, with a focus on California, Washington, and New York. Moore's analysis of punk rock and hardcore scenes maps out the development of these scenes, the social and political factors that influenced certain changes in the generation of youth who were involved in these scenes, and how the music and organization around these scenes had an effect on broader American culture. Moore also touches on the different gendered dynamics of these musical scenes and traditions, such as hypermasculinity, stage performance, and the Riot Grrrl movement. His analysis of these movements begins with the development of punk in the 1970's as a counterculture to the rock and roll, hippie movement of the sixties. This is important to note as Moore expresses that the "utopianism" that was expressed by the hippie movement of the sixties, "…had been exhausted, and a collective sense of dread had developed with the onset of economic recession, political crisis and cultural malaise" (Moore 2010: 8). With this quote in

mind, it will be fruitful to juxtapose the conditions that sparked a nationwide musical movement, punk, to the conditions we find ourselves in today. I argue that there is yet another "collective sense of dread" felt by the youths of today, as we are faced with similar political and economic prospects, as well a particularly dreadful climate crisis. Interestingly enough, most, if not all, of these dreadful prospects can be traced back to the legacy left by the baby boomers, the same generation which was at the forefront of the aforementioned hippie utopianism of the sixties rock scene.

This study will also be analyzing the importance of the venue in a music scene, and how these venues act as the physical space where social interactions, which are crucial to these musical scenes and movements, take place. Dawson Barrett's essay, *DIY Democracy: The Direct Action Politics of U.S. Punk Collectives*, discusses the history and politics involved in running DIY venues like the ones discussed in this study. By putting Barrett's essay in conversation with my study of New York DIY, and the affects that gentrification and COVID-19 have had on the scene, I am arguing that the physical loss of venues is a large cause for concern. Not only do people lose their businesses by succumbing to the economic pressures of gentrification, the community as a whole loses the physical space where they were able to find community, personal identity, as well as a hub of social and political activism. In this essay, Barrett brings into discussion other activist-scholars with punk backgrounds, and their assertions that punk is a "pre-political phenomenon" which aids in the creation of personal identity (Barret 2013: 25). His criticism of these claims is that they undervalue the political organizing and direct-action work done by members of the punk community. I will be using both of these assertions in my own research, so that both the personal and political aspects of these spaces can be fully realized. While Barrett does not disregard or disagree with the assertions which he critiques, I believe that

it is important to keep the "pre-political" ideas of personhood and identity in mind while thinking about the concrete political actions these scenes cultivate.

The other aspect of Barrett's essay that I will be focusing on is his analysis of the "DIY ethos". This ethos, as he puts it is, "…a common tendency toward direct action politics, punk rock is also, by definition, a participatory movement." (Barrett 2013: 26). In Barrett's essay he focuses on two notable venues that put this horizontal structure into practices; 924 Gillman in California, and ABC No Rio in New York. This particular analysis goes into detail about how these venues were structured, the communities they created, and how they dealt with issues such as; racism, homophobia, Nazi punks, and broader political issues both locally and nationally. As Barrett explicitly states, "ABC No Rio and 924 Gilman Street were both structured according to the same basic two-part mission: to provide a safe atmosphere by confronting violence and oppressive behavior, and to involve each member of the punk community directly, through a process of consensus-based decision-making" (Barrett 2013: 27). This two-part mission is one that I find intrinsic to the ethos of DIY as a practice of making space for individuals to be able to participate in an artistic community that cultivates their individual voices and beliefs. In this way more people from different backgrounds and walks of life can work together to hold safe spaces for performances that go beyond just the music. This is because, as the title suggests, punk and DIY is a direct-action movement, where ideologies of community are put directly into practice in the venues that facilitate the music.

All of this is not to say that punk and DIY venues are purely places for political activism. They are much more than this. They are the physical spaces where people who may otherwise feel ostracized from their hometown community, family, and broader popular culture can be around those who have had similar feelings and experiences. That is why the venue, as both an

idea and a concrete reality, play such an important role in this musical practice. Beyond being the space where shows are held, they have also been places where artists and young people live when they can't find housing, and have offered different kinds of community outreach for the locals that live in the surrounding area. Thus, the final aspect of Barrett's essay that I will be drawing from is the discussion about real estate, and how music venues have had to contend with "urban renewal" and those legal forces which threaten their lifespan in the neighborhood. ABC No Rio is one such venue, that had a very long and turbulent battle with real estate development in New York City's Lower East Side during a period of urban renewal and development. Barrett opens this discussion with the housing conflicts of 1988, when the city began to enforce a curfew on the nearby Tompkins Square Park, which was a direct attack on the neighborhood's homeless community. They also began to evict a large portion of the squatters in nearby buildings. These actions by the local government gave rise to a series of riots and protests, which resulted in arrests and cases of police brutality. While ABC No Rio did not directly involve themselves in these events, responded by holding benefits for those evicted and screened footage from riots. This response from the venue is one example of the care for local communities that DIY spaces are able to provide, and why I argue for their importance beyond just music.

This instance of ABC No Rio's involvement with city politics is important in understanding their relationship with the policy makers of the time. This antithetical relationship is exemplified in the collective's series of lawsuits, rent strikes, and negotiations with housing officials over ownership of the space. Representatives of the collective were engaged in these disputes for abut fifteen years, appearing at hearings for city permits, filing lawsuits against the city, having sit-ins at the housing department, and even chaining themselves to the actual venue

in an attempt to halt the eviction process. These tactics further portray their commitment direct political action. As Barrett concludes on the subject of spaces like ABC No Rio, "They were inherently radical spaces, and their survival depended on effective, not just symbolic, strategies and tactics. … punk rock sought to carve out a space that was closed to the market and controlled by the community that used it" (Barrett 2013: 37). Thus, the ethos of DIY is not just how to think about community, but it is an active practice which challenges the political dominance of capitalism in our society. Rather than ascribing to hierarchical power structures that are championed by capitalism, DIY's horizontal structures of leadership encourages members of all backgrounds and identities to make their voices heard, in a world that often works to silence them.

This study of politics and urban renewal in the context of DIY and punk music venues lead me to further investigate the gentrification of New York City. To do this I will be putting Sarah Schulman's book, *The Gentrification of The Mind: Witness To a Lost Imagination*, into conversation with my study. Schulman's writing exposes the connections between the gentrification of the Lower East Side in the 80's and the AIDS epidemic. Her book is much more than a historical re-telling of these events, as she couples her historical narrative with deeply personal accounts of her friends and colleges who died of AIDS, as well as her involvement with Act Up.

The most crucial element of Schulman's writing to this work overall is her definition of the experience of gentrification, as it goes much deeper than just the economic aspects. For Schulman, "…the literal experience of gentrification is a concrete replacement process. Physically it is an urban phenomenon: the removal of communities of diverse classes, ethnicities, races, sexualities, languages, and points of view from the central neighborhoods of cities, and

their replacement by more homogenized groups" (Shulman 2012: 14). In this study I will be applying Schulman's writing on gentrification to two specific aspects of my work. The first will be to establish an understanding of the social and economic effects of gentrification in New York City. The second will be to think about what gentrification sounds like in a musical context. Furthermore, in this second approach, I will describe how present-day DIY and punk scenes create a soundscape that is the antithesis of gentrification.

It is important to note here that New York City as a whole was facing bankruptcy in the 1970's. The residents who remained were a mix of poor, working class and middle-class residents, who lived in relatively low rent neighborhoods. Schulman argues that this economic makeup of the city did not provide a wide enough tax bracket to support infrastructure, and was thus used as an excuse for city policies to be made to explicitly attract wealthier residents (Schulman 2012: 25). These city policies came in the form of tax breaks for real-estate developers who would covert these low-income neighborhoods into high rent districts overflowing with luxury apartments and condominiums. Thus, creating the labyrinth of glass and steel we now associate with luxury living in the urban landscape.

Shulman's theory about what it means to be gentrified comes from a more concrete analysis of the economic and cultural shifts that she experienced while living in Lower Manhattan in the 70's and 80's. Schulman, herself an out lesbian, notes that her neighborhood had a very large concertation of LGBTQ youth, as well as various immigrant communities, both of whom were, more often than not, poor or working class. This is an important distinction as she argues against the assumption that is was the arrival of artists that gentrified these neighborhoods. Rather, it was the arrival of young urban professionals, sometimes called "yuppies", coupled with the economic goals of local governments that locked in the fates of

these neighborhoods. It was also at this time that the AIDS epidemic was spreading rapidly among the gay community. Schulman notes that the AIDS epidemic accelerated the process of gentrifying these neighborhoods, as it was rapidly killing many low-income residents who were paying rents at "pre-gentrification" rates. In one particular remembrance she recalls how a young man who lived in her building died of AIDS after their tenant's association won a four-year rent strike, which resulted in a rent reduction. However, after his death his particular apartment went from being $305 per month to the market price of $1,200 per month (Schulman 2012: 38). This stark increase in rent, coupled with quick turnover rates, caused by AIDS related death, is a large factor in the conversion of the Lower East Side from, "… an interracial enclave of immigrants, artists, and longtime residents to a destination location for wealthy diners…" (Schulman 2012: 38). She noticed that this became an ongoing trend that extended beyond apartments alone. local establishments such as grocery stores, cheap restaurants and laundry mats were met with similar fates as they were being bought out by real estate developers and turned into expensive high-end restaurants which appealed to one clientele; the new wealthy, often white, residents who moved to the city to make their fortunes in the Midtown and Wall Street office buildings. Thus, the neighborhood fell victim to the aforementioned homogenizing effects of gentrification.

The theme of homogeneity that has been offered here, is one which is crucial to understanding the current DIY scene's post-gentrification soundscape. I use the prefix post- here because the scene that is at the center of this study is comprised of a generation that is fully aware of the gentrification going on around them. Unlike previous generations, they grew up in a city that is so deeply entrenched in the practice and politics of urban renewal, that this cycle is one which is highly recognizable to them. When they see the streets they once frequented to attend shows begin to be filled by minimalist coffee shops and boutiques they do not see this as

some marker of the "natural" evolution of urbanity. They know this means that the corner stores, bodegas, and local restaurants which served a plethora of cuisines for relatively low prices are on their way to being replaced by high end vintage boutiques and overpriced salad bars. They also knew that the venue, whether located in the second floor of an old warehouse, or in the middle of a random street in Bushwick between the bodega and the taco spot, were bound to close any second. Whether it's because the rents got to high, or some overseas company bought the building from the city to build high rise luxury condos or soulless steel office buildings, these neighborhoods were on the road to a post-gentrification reality, and this generation can see it clear as day.

The once colorful neighborhoods, full of a mixture of different people, from a wide range of age groups, ethnic backgrounds, and occupations, becomes undistinguishable from places like Williamsburg, Long Island City, and Manhattan's Lower East Side. They become filled with young urban "professionals", who flock to these locals from some small suburban American town, to work in the city and live in modern apartment complexes complete with any amenity you could dream of. Thus, these neighborhoods embody the homogenized aesthetic that Schulman describes in her book. I will be arguing that this aesthetic of homogenization becomes the "sound" of gentrification. In doing this, I argue that the scene's practice of exemplifying difference, by local musicians' acts containing a variety of sonic qualities, create the soundscape of a generation against gentrification.

In theorizing the venue, itself being a sight for the proliferation of a DIY music scene, questions of what makes a venue "DIY" can arise. Different people will have different answers for what makes a venue "DIY". Whether it's the size of the space, or whatever they perceive to be the "vibe", it is difficult to place one specific definition of what makes a venue DIY. I will

explore this trope of the venue not having one fixed definition by putting it in conversation with Chapter 3 of Judith Butler's *Undoing Gender, "Doing Justice to Someone: Sex Reassignment and Allegories of Transsexuality"*, as well as excerpts from Jay Prosser's *A Skin of One's Own: Toward a Theory of Transsexual Embodiment*, which offers a further investigation of Butler's theorization of gender. By using these two texts in conversation with this trope, I will be utilizing a transgender studies and queer theory lens, which is derived from Foucauldian schools of thought, to theorize the embodied space of the venue, and in this way actively "trans" the venue as well as the musical practices that takes place in said venues.

Butler's chapter in Undoing Gender, tells the story of David Reimer, and discusses how his particular case in the medical establishment brings up questions about gender, justice, and the medical establishment's intervention and interest in the gendering of individuals. Reimer's story is one which exposes how normative ideas of gender and biological sex inform decisions about a person's embodied gender which can scar them for life. In this sense, I am alluding to both physical and emotional scars, as the experiences that Reimer went through in order to make him conform to a certain gender category were traumatic. At his birth, Reimer's penis was accidentally burned during a procedure that was done with an overly powerful surgical tool that the surgeon had no experience with prior to the procedure. This resulted in his parents deciding to raise him socially as a girl, renaming him Brenda and sending him to John Money's Gender Identity Institute to try and convince him of his status as "female".

Throughout this process, David (from a young age) was subjected to Money's "care", where he would subject David to graphic images of vagina's, videos of birth, and most shockingly, force David to perform mock coital positions with his brother. Later in life, David chose to seek out medical intervention which would essentially "masculinize" his physiology,

and restore his genitals to some semblance of the penis he was born with. This recounting of Reimer's story connects to Butler's further analysis of how gender and ideas of its manifestations in people has been understood in societies dealing with the norms that inform gendered embodiment and the extent to which internalized "truths" define what "gender" is. She puts this in conversation with Foucault's idea of truth making and how that is linked to relations of power which define what constitutes as "true".

Butler's further analysis of the implications that David's story has had on notions of bodily truths, and the ways that it has become, "…a point of reference for a narrative that…interrogates the limits of the conceivably human" (Butler 2004: 64). This point of reference is notable as David was never intersex or transgender, but rather, the mutability of his gendered embodiment came from the violent surgical interventions of a medical system which prioritized fixed definitions of a binary sex/gender system. Butler, in arguing against this binary sex/gender system, brings in different scientific and theoretical analyses of gender which question the preeminence of this binary system. Such examples she draws on are medical studies that have claimed that the gender of children is mailable and can be changed through gendered socializations in the early stages of their lives, and theoretical endeavors that have attempted to pinpoint the meaning of gender. Most pertinent to my analysis of the venue is Butler's discussion of the Kate Bornstein's argument that the meaning of gender, in a trans context, is the engagement in the act of transformation. In this engagement, which furthers Beauvoir's theories of becoming woman, becoming is the act of gender itself. I will be applying this to the DIY scene, as there is no universal definition to what DIY means. Therefore, I locate the act of "doing" in DIY as the vehicle through which to understand it.

In Bringing in Prosser's analysis of similar phenomena, I will be looking at the ways in which he discusses the nature of transition. While he uses it in a more gendered sense by looking at the created subject position of the transsexual, I will be applying this theorization more broadly to a musical practice and space which is always transitioning. In the introduction to A Skin of One's Own: Toward a Theory of Transsexual Embodiment, Prosser recounts an autobiographical account of transitioning in the closed space of a class he was teaching at the beginning of his physical transition. During this time, the changing of his physical appearance and presentation created an air of discomfort and uncertainty between him and his students. Through his description of this time in his life he comes to a discussion of the theme of transition that was brought up in a text they were discussing in his class. Referring to this period of transition as a "nonzone", Prosser asserts that transition is necessary for the continued formation of identity. Thus, in applying this to discussion around the venue as something that is trans, one can see that the unstable nature of the physical space of the venue can be argued to induce similar instances of anxiety around our ties to identity.

In this case, it is the identity with the community and the music that is created and performed in these venues. Furthermore, in applying Prosser's ideas of this "nonzone" of transition, the "venue" can be seen as a marriage between the uncertainty around the physical reality of a space's lifespan, and the ephemeral existence of the venue as a conceptual space for performance. It is this overarching theme of uncertainty which I argue, lends to the "transing" of the venue. As I have shown through the work of Prosser and Butler, trans identities are riddled with narratives of uncertainty, fragile ties between one's physicality and their embodiment, and active redefinition of personal identity. In arguing for the transing of DIY venues, as well as DIY in general, I am connecting these tropes of trans identity to the ways in which the venue is a

space where its physical lifespan is uncertain in the changing city. Furthermore, that the definition of such spaces actively changes depending on the ways in which DIY is embodied in the identities of those in the scene.

Chapter 2: Historical Analysis

To understand the New York music scene that I have described previously it is important to understand the movements and musical scenes that built the DIY ideology that we use today. Furthermore, understanding this history will also further clarify the definition of DIY that I am utilizing in this study. This chapter will begin by discussing the emergence of punk and rock youth subcultures, and how they evolved over time, each evolution adding to a broader understanding of musical community and DIY/punk spaces. This overview of the emergence of the music as a particular genre/scene will also be coupled with a brief look at the political and economic status of the country in the 1970's, as this had a notable impact on the state of the "middle class". This discussion of DIY will then go briefly into a brief explanation and definition of what it means to be called and "indie" band. This Definition of Indie music will come from a brief look at the evolution of its meaning from record labels which are independent of major labels to its connotation as a musical genre. Once and understanding of these topics has been established, I will then localize this historical analysis to New York City. Specifically, I will be discussing the economic and cultural factors that have perpetuated the gentrification of its neighborhoods, and what this has meant to the communities that have called this city home. This historical analysis of gentrification will serve to color further discussions about how it affects the DIY communities that are central to this study. Finally, this chapter will touch on a recent and ongoing history, that of the COVID-19 pandemic. This is important to this study as it has had a permanent effect on the world of live music performance, both financially and socially.

2a: Punk, Rock, Youth Subcultures and the Birth of DIY

The year 1975 is often cited as the year that Punk became recognized as a genre. Rooted in the scenes surrounding New York's clubs like CBGB's, Max's Kansas City and ABC No Rio,

Punk quickly became a symbol of youth rebellion and angst across America. On the other side of

the country, California clubs like 924 Gillman were the hubs of punk and alternative lifestyles on

the West Coast. The punks of the 70's created a sound that was antagonistic to the hippie

counterculture that had since been absorbed by mainstream rock n' roll, furthermore, punk was a

reaction to the failed utopianism of this 60's counterculture (Moore 2010: 8). Following this

"failed utopianism", was a rather drastic change in the state of the economic and political

practices in the United States. As Moore discusses in his book, the decades which followed

World War II showed an increase in the standard of living for the working class, which created a

thriving middle class (Moore 2010: 16). However, this middle class would quickly be threatened

by the rise of post-Fordist capitalism and neoliberalism.

This threatening of the American middle class began by about 1970, "…as manufacturing

jobs that had brought union wages and job security were steadily eliminated or outsourced", an

event which hit manual laborers and people of color the hardest (Moore 2010: 16). Moore's

further analysis of this economic situation shows that while the middle and lower classes in

America were increasing a steady decrease in wages and net earnings, the wealthiest Americans

were experiencing a sharp increase in their wealth. This situation comes as an effect of

neoliberalism, which is a political practice which favors free market capitalism with an emphasis

on the limited intervention of the government in economic affairs. Thus, this practice has caused

a massive increase in the cost of living in America, while the minimum/mean wage of the

working class has remained has remained practically stagnant since the late 70's. This economic

reality remains true, while popular American culture, especially during economic boom times,

continued to sell the "American Dream" as easily achievable to those who work hard.

Furthermore, the posh lifestyle of celebrities and overnight millionaires was increasingly in the

face of popular media, while the overwhelming reality for American Youth in the 70's and 80's was much different (Moore 2010: 17). The culture of individualism and cutthroat competition that came out of this bread the cynicism for the American political and economic systems felt by the youth of this period, as they witnessed cheating and nepotism become common roads to "success". Ultimately, I find that Moore's concluding thoughts on his section titled "Anarchy in the USA", provides one with a concise understanding of the effect that the capitalist practices of the 70's and 80's had on American youth at the time. His use of this title, which draws on the title of the popular Sex Pistols son, "Anarchy in the UK", is meant to show that, "… the true source of anarchy in contemporary society is unrestrained capitalism" (Moore 2010: 18). This "unrestrained capitalism" that surrounded the youth of the 70's and 80's prioritized commodification and selfish capitalist pursuits void of a recognizable code of ethics was over the welfare of the American population. Thus, their counterculture to this was an "anarchy" of sorts which served as not only a release the anger and angst they felt, but also to form a community of like-minded individuals who were not pleased with the system they were faced with. This spirit of anarchy and counter culture can still be seen in today's DIY and punk scene's, as they continue to push up against the newest iterations of capitalism.

2b: Punk In New York's Underground Art World of the 60's & 70's

Different people would argue as to where punk music was originally started. Some might argue that it all started in Los Angeles with bands like X and The Dead Kennedys. Others could point to the thriving Washington DC scene, where punk rock legends such as Minor Thread and Bad Brains were formed. However, I would argue that punk, and its predecessors which can be noted as having direct influence on the genre, started in New York City. Specifically, one could find the roots of pun rock in the East Village and the Lower East Side's art and music scenes of

the mid to late sixties and early seventies. This is not to de-value the importance of the LA, D.C., and even the UK scenes, however for the sake of clarity I will begin by discussing punk's origins in the dark gritty streets of New York City in the 60's and 70's.

New York in the mid to late 1960's was a place that would seem almost unrecognizable to any recent NYC transplant who's recently moved to any one of the five boroughs over the last thirty years. The East Village and Lower East side were once home to many iconic clubs and artists spaces. They were a cultural hub for the experimental and innovative sounds that would influence punk music. Some such clubs were CBGB's, Max's Kansas City, and ABC No Rio. These music clubs as well as the apartments that surrounded them were the home to artists who would eventually rise to international fame, as well as infamy. Andy Warhol, and his studio, The Factory, found their early home there, as well as The Velvet Underground, Nico, Patti Smith, and Iggy and the Stooges, and the New York Dolls just to name a few (McCain, McNeil: 1996). In fact, it was in Andy Warhol's studio where the members of The Velvet's, specifically Lou Reed, and Nico would hang out and indulge in art and music, as well as the popular drug culture of amphetamine's (speed), and eventually heroin. The Velvet Underground, in collaboration with Andy Warhol and Nico, would eventually release what is arguably one of their most iconic albums, "The Velvet Underground and Nico" in 1967.

While the events, artists and bands that found their home in the back alleys and venues of Manhattan in the 1960's were influential in the art world, they are but the predecessors and influences of what would become the foundation of the punk scene. While the New York Dolls, a glam rock band that was very popular in this art scene, were making even more of a name for themselves by performing in drag at Club 87 in 1974, another band was emerging as one of the first truly punk bands. In the same year, Television played their first show at CBGB's, an event

which some people celebrate as the beginning of punk in the United States. Television is also notable in the discussion of the curation of a DIY ethos, as their manager Terry Ork helped them release their first single, "little Johnny Jewel", on his own Ork Label in 1975 (Dale 2008: 174). While this was definitely not the first time an artist from this scene, or any artist for that matter, had released their music independent of major labels, (see Patti Smith and the No Wave Movement), this is notable as it is one of the first instances of a punk/DIY band using their own independent label to promote and release their music, embodying what it means to "do-it-yourself".

2c: What Happened Next? Hardcore & Heavy Metal Politics

The mid 1960's and 70's saw a dramatic increase in the number of bands that would fall under the label of Punk. Some such bands being The Ramones, The Clash, Black Flag, The Dead Kennedys, and Bad Religion just to name a few. Since then, many of these bands have come to be widely known outside of the communities where they got their start, many even achieving international fame. The aforementioned short list of some of the first punk bands hail from communities spanning across the United States, from New York city's boroughs of Queens and Manhattan, to the suburbs of California's major cities. These scenes carried their own unique sound and quality, but were drawn together by shared sentiments of community, rebellion, and a general disdain for the world they were left by older generations. The source of this disdain and rebellion, as it has been discussed in previous chapters, fueled everything from the lyricism and playing style, to the style and general attitude of any person who interacted with these scenes. As Moore discusses in his book, punk seemed to fall as quickly as it rose, as a new form took over. This musical style would become known as Hardcore Punk, or just Hardcore.

Hardcore differentiates itself from its punk predecessors with a much faster tempo, and an overall scene that can come off as more violent. This is due to the popular dancing style it proliferated, often called "slamming", where audience members would literally slam into one another with little to no regard for the physical well-being of other audience members (Moore 2010: 53). This gave hardcore the reputation of being a show of masculinity and toughness, rather than being a scene of pure rebellion and youth disdain.

It is important here to introduce punk's involvement in politics, and the event that have come to intertwine punk music and DIY scenes with politics. Specifically, the summer of 1965 in the DC Punk scene, a period of time that would later be known as "Revolution Summer". Local punks would regularly participate in protests against apartheid in South Africa, hosting "percussion protests" which utilized punks' ability to make noise to impact protests and politics. Punk activism continued and flourished beyond the summer of 1965, however, this year marked a notable surge in political punk activity, and no doubt had a lasting impact on the community's practices of activism regarding a variety of different local and global issues. In addition to this many punks and punk affiliated groups worked with various grassroots organizations for a variety of other causes such as homelessness, battered women and low-income people. Bands like Fugazi in particular, worked the financial front of many of these causes through hosting benefit concerts to collect funds.

With this establishment of punk and DIY's roots in politics and activism, it can be asserted that politics of power and identity are also weaved into this history, as their music and movements often allude to the power, or lack thereof, held by youths in these scenes. One development in this history that helps display this is the creation and rise of Heavy metal as a subgenre. Similar to hardcore punk, heavy metal often evokes an image of violence, masculinity,

and varying forms of power. However, a lot of heavy metal does this through allusions to mythology and fantasy as it, "…objectifies power into monsters and magical forces of evil in an act of reification that symbolizes a loss of control over all of societies institutions" (Moore 2010: 87). This analysis of heavy metals usage of fantasy and myth by Moore alludes to the working class consciousness of the 1970's and 80's that influenced the creation of heavy metal music. Furthermore, it was the general sense of powerlessness felt by the youth of this generation as they seemingly had no control over the powers of production under capitalism. Through his Marxist analysis of this phenomenon, Moore connects the use of monsters and Satan, among other examples, to other historical uses of these images as a way to display the nearly mystical and invisible forces that have wield power over the poor and working class. The forces in play in the time of heavy metal were that of the deindustrialization of the market place that took shape in the 70's and 80's that came as a result of the globalization of the market and a noticeable decrease in manufacturing jobs. This shift also came in tandem with the rise of Silicon Valley as a hub for venture capitalism, computer culture, and the shift towards automation and computer-based careers.

The aforementioned shifts in the forces of the economy and the general nature of the state of United States capitalism overall represented for much of the working class youth a crisis in the ability for upward mobility. This generation, many of whom may have been brought up in blue collar families, were now presented with a reality that the "American Dream" could not be found in manufacturing and manual labor jobs. This leads to not only a crisis in ideas around masculinity, but also in the looming prospects of downward mobility, as the skills they may have acquired or looked up to, no longer gave them the ability to work towards the "dream" of nuclear family structures and home ownership. Much of this can be seen in the music and lyrics of bands

such as Black Sabbath, Iron Maiden, and Judas Priest, among various others. It is also important to note that the United States was also involved in the Vietnam War at this time, which contributed to the overall feeling of powerlessness and anger towards the government, as many saw it as a pointless war of imperial power that caused thousands unnecessary deaths. These factors all contribute to the youth's interest in heavy metal, as well as other forms of punk and rock, as a release of their anger and frustration through the music as well as the concerts and performance of the musical style. As the genre developed, so too did their expressions of power as protests against the overwhelming authority of government and social structures that worked to keep the working class powerless.

 After the 1980's heavy metal split into many different sub-genres such as black metal and death metal, etc.… each of which pulled from different influences. It was at this time that another subversive genre was forming. One which wished to counter the mainstream all-together, much in the same way as the early punks. This genre would later come to be known as grunge.

2d: Grunge and the rise of "Indie" as a Genre Label

Possibly one of the most well-known and influential bands to come out of the development of grunge music is Nirvana. While they rose to mainstream success, they started their musical career in the bohemian college towns in the Seattle and Olympia scenes in Washington state. By the 90's, Seattle and Olympia locals had become deeply intrenched in the production of zines, DIY culture, and the rise of the Riot Grrrl feminist movement in punk. Nirvana's breakthrough release, "Smells Like Teen Spirit", released in 1992, encapsulated what lead singer Kurt Cobain felt to be the ethos of that generation of DIY's beliefs and practices. He felt that the ideas being circulated, those of anticorporate punk, feminism, queer politics and straight edge lifestyles were intriguing but ultimately very naïve (Moore 2010: 115). However,

the contradictory nature of the song's lyrics displays Cobain's feelings that, "…revolution may have been necessary but was simply impossible in light of his peer's consumer-induced apathy…which he also identified in his own confusion and ineffectuality" (Moore 2010: 115). This breakdown of Nirvana's entrance into the mainstream through the avenue of grunge music is, I believe, crucial to gaining a general understanding of this generation's interactions with mainstream media as well as politics at the time, as "Smells Like Teen Spirit" has become one of the most popular songs of this genre, and arguably and anthem of the generation.

With this baseline understanding of the apathetic rage of a generation that grew up in the shadow of the baby boomers, one can ascertain why and how the music of bands like Nirvana, Dinosaur Jr. and Smashing Pumpkins spoke to this cohort of disempowered youths. By the 1990's, the largescale deindustrialization and shift towards a global economy that colored the formation of heavy metal created a consumer market that exaggerated, "…the discrepancy between increasing expectations and constricting opportunities" for the declining middle class (Moore 2010: 117). This overall cultural shift fueled the rise of "alternative" music as a genre, as the bands that participated in this presented an unpolished aesthetic with gritty lo-fi sounds, tattered cloths and shaggy hairstyles. They further popularized notions that early punk began on, which is that the music is low-budget, while also presenting a more sensitive, antimacho approach, which was antithetical to the hardcore and heavy metal of the 70's and 80's (Moore 2010: 117).

The rise in popularity of "alternative" music and lifestyles among the youth of the 1990's, also came new modes in which capitalism and market strategies worked to appeal to this emerging class of creatives and "rebels". New marketing strategies of the time realized that instead of pushing for the 80's style of, "…hedonism and acquisition…", it would be much more

profitable to promote ideas of authenticity in the form of niche markets that could offer the

illusion of achieving individuality through participating in this system (Moore 2010: 119). It is

an interesting, although looking back from current reality almost predictable, phenomenon that

this new mode of "creative capitalism" arose. This is because it comes from an alternative genre

that was built on the DIY ethic anti-capitalism and separation from the industry of "culture".

Thus, this absorption of alternative and grunge aesthetics into mainstream media and marketing

helps one to understand how "indie" or "independent" shifted from a mode of producing music

without intervention of major labels, to a genre of music.

2e: Indie to Now- How Indie Assumed the Position of Genre, and How This Manifests in Today's DIY Music Scene

The shift from "indie" as a prefix denoting that a record label is run and operated

independent of the major mainstream labels to a word that encompasses an entire genre is one

that can be mapped over a brief period of time. As it has been mentioned in previous sections the

idea of an "independent label" began to take shape in the mid to late 1970's, with the release of

Televisions song Little Johnny Jewel, The Buzzcock's Spiral Scratch EP, and the Desperate

Bicycles release of their Smokescreen'/'Handlebars' single. Of the aforementioned releases, the

one which most explicitly nodded to the ethos of a DIY release was that of the Desperate

Bicycles single. This is not only because they did so by creating their own label, but because of

their direct statement at the conclusion of the single that, "It was easy, it was cheap, go and do

it!" (Dale 2008: 173). This statement embodies the idea that indie and DIY as praxis is

something that should be accessible to anyone who wants to make and distribute music, because,

in theory, distribution independent of major label bureaucracy should be affordable. This

affordability initially came from a range of technological advancements in the 70's such as the

mass production of basic multi-track recording devices, as well as increased availability of Xerox

machines (Dale 2008: 175). Such advancements made it easier than ever before for bands and

other members of local music scenes to cheaply record and distribute music as well as fanzines.

This practice of independent music recording and distribution expanded into fully formed

record labels, the most prominent of which being the Rough Trade label. Rough Trade, which

also operated as a record shop and distributer, remained an independent label from 1976 until

2002, when the label was bought by BMG, a German major label associated with Sony. While

groups such as Rough Trade are still record labels in the sense that they would sign bands under

their label and take certain cuts when it came to profits (although they would split them 50/50

rather than only give the bands 10/20% like major labels). The major difference between indie

and major labels was that the bands had more, if not all the power, when it came to how and

what was released. Therefore, the establishment of indie record labels and the increased ability

for bands to self-release music, are ways in which the underlying politics of DIY scenes are put

into practice. In this practice, the youth are able to seize power through controlling all the means

of their own production, creating a market that is antithetical to capitalism.

Despite the increased affordability of distributing music, independent labels and bands

associated with DIY and independent music scenes frequently succumb to economic hardships

and get sucked into the mainstream music industry. One example of this is when bands that start

out on independent record labels "sell out" to the majors once they gained some popularity.

Another common occurrence, and arguably more damaging to the goals of an independent DIY

ethos than "selling out", is the acquisition of independent record labels by what Dale calls the

"Big Four" major record labels (Dale 2008: 172). Dale also brings up the work of Stephen lee

who frequently points to the, "…inevitability of co-optation and states flatly that the goal of a

parallel industry, is difficult, if not impossible to achieve" (Dale 2008: 179). The purchasing of small indie labels by the majors is one instance which has arguably led to the commodification of independent DIY aesthetics and the association of the term "indie" as a genre label. There are a variety of factors that can be attributed to independent labels finding it necessary to merge with the majors during the late 1980's and early 90's. However, in the interest of this historical pursuit I will be discussing the events surrounding the rise of The Smiths, and how their beginnings in the independent labels went on to have an impact on the entire independent music community.

The Smiths operate as a moment in time which one can use to differentiate between the old school ethos of DIY independent and the more mainstream commodification of independent music aesthetics. As a band they bought to the table a very strong and curated image, and well-crafted music and lyricism which was not extremely common for these labels (Dale 2008: 181). After their first five albums sold at unbelievable rates, about half a million copies each from 1983-1987, they signed to the major label EMI. However, this unprecedented success of The Smiths under Rough Trade relayed to the indie labels the false reality that the following cohort of indie guitar bands could match that success, a belief that would greatly contribute to independent labels future economic hardships (Dale 2008: 181). Regardless of the influence of the success of The Smiths, as the process of "indie" becoming a genre marker rather than a practice is part of a more complex web of business deals between the major and independent labels. Thus, as major labels and top charts began promoting their ideas of what "indie" sounds like (most famously the band Oasis comes to mind) the prefix began took on a whole new definition from a practice to a musical style.

Chapter 3: Setting the Scene

I remember exactly where I was when the full weight and reality of COVID-19 set in. At the time I had exciting and high energy shows lined up at the punk venue that I recently took over with my friends, and my own band had at least three gigs lined up, including playing at Bard's annual Spring Fling. However, March 13th of 2020 put all of this to a grinding halt, as this was the day that my world turned upside down. It was a was a grey overcast day, the wind blew strongly through the trees and for some reason I could feel that there was something slightly "off" about the day. I attributed that to the looming deadlines for moderating into my desired major, and shrugged off my suspicions. I was leaving what I didn't know would be my last in-person class for a long time, and I got an email notification from the Bard College president. I didn't think much of it at first, but as I ran into my friends in front of the dorms near the music building, I felt my feelings about the uneasiness of the day solidify. As I approached they looked at me, and I could see a sense of urgency and stress in their eyes. We knew that the pandemic was already in the United States, but it still seemed like some far-away issue that could be contained. That there was no way it would be able to reach us in the bucolic borders of Annandale-on-Hudson. However, as we read the email telling us that Bard would begin the process of closing and going remote the truth set in. We were not immune. Whether the "we" in question is Bard, New York, or the United States as a whole, the fact that we now had to learn how to grapple with an uncertain reality became very real.

Two years have passed since that day, and I can't say with certainty that the "normalcy" we once knew is possible in the near future. From the way we travel to the way we simply interact with each other on a daily basis has been the subject of intense debate, and most likely will be for the foreseeable future. Along with this discussion of a "return to normalcy" one must

also think about the long-lasting effects something as impactful as COVID will have on the individual both socially and mentally. As one of my interlocuters, David, has expressed to me on multiple occasions, people are feeling traumatized by the pandemic. He says that they are fearful of being in closed rooms with even small groups of strangers. Furthermore, there are now generations of children, teenagers and young adults who have spent some of their formative years as far as learning how to socialize quarantined in their homes. I have observed that these social effects of the pandemic have had, and will most likely continue to have, a large impact on the state of live music regardless of the size of the music scene.

Like many other social events and practices, live music turned to the virtual world in 2020. It took form in a variety of iterations. From zoom concerts, to twitch, Minecraft servers, Instagram lives, and a myriad of other live streaming platforms, live music persisted. While these different attempts to keep audiences engaged with bands and musical communities worked as a band-aid solution, it's been discussed time and time again that there is no true alternative to a real in-person live music event. I have delved into ethnographic inquires surrounding this phenomenon in the past, each time concluding that internet concerts fail at recreating and accurate representation of live music due to the pitfalls that come with virtual reality.

3b: Method

This project so far has been a journey filled with trials and tribulations, as the uncertain nature of the COVID-19 pandemic has presented me with a variety of barriers to traditional modes of fieldwork and ethnographic inquiry. Due to the uncertain nature of different national and local mandates around travel and in-person gatherings, specifically in the case of small-scale DIY shows, field sites were extremely difficult to come by and engage with in a safe manner. However, thanks to the creation and distribution of vaccines and subsequent boosters, I was able

to go to and attend a small selection of live in-person music events in New York City. It should also be noted that some events I had been planning to engage with as fields sites were canceled due to Omicron variant of the Corona virus. This caused a hiccup in my fieldwork, as these sites were intended to deepen my engagement with the current state of New York DIY.

The sites I was able to engage with vary in size, the kind of crowd they bring in and type of artists they generally host. The first site is Elsewhere zone in the Bushwick are of Brooklyn. Elsewhere is what I would describe as a mid-tier venue in terms of "legitimacy". By this I mean that it is not as established as arena style venues like MSG or the Barclays Center, however it does not function in the same ways as a typical DIY venue. Elsewhere is a multi-room venue and nightclub which contains rooms and stages of various sizes as well as a rooftop space and bar. They employ official staff and security and require ID and most recently vaccine cards for entry. Ticket prices for their events usually range between twenty and forty dollars, and more often than not need to be purchased prior to the event. Some of these factors lead to varying degrees of accessibility issues, such as ticket prices as well as age restricted events which usually only go as low as 18+. Elsewhere self describes itself on their website as an underground venue, however this descriptor of "underground" is one which can be subjective. Regardless of whether or not everyone would agree to the underground status of this venue, they do host up and coming artists on a regular basis.

My second site of interest is The Living Gallery, which is also located in the Bushwick area of Brooklyn. The Living Gallery is much closer to what I would describe as a DIY venue. It is located in what used to be a flower shop, and hosts a variety of different shows and events. They also have a community fridge located just outside of the venue. In terms of the overall look and aesthetic of the space, it's walls, entrances, hallways, bathroom and backyard are covered in

colorful murals which they commission by local artists. There is no stage in the space, as the main room is simply an event space with white walls and a wood floor. Anyone can rent the space to hold nearly any kind of event they would like. Over the years I have frequented the space for events such as art shows, concerts, and mixes of the two. The one thing that has struck me the most about The Living Gallery is how it has persisted through the years despite the increasing gentrification that has affected the neighborhood in recent years. This is important to note here as a neighboring venue located just a few blocks away, The Glove, closed in the summer of 2019 due to economic hardships and was assumedly bought by some real estate developer hoping to turn it into luxury apartments or a niche luxury storefront. Sadly, this has been the fate of many venues that have come before The Glove. Regardless, The Living Gallery has been able to survive the forces of gentrification and COVID-19 which have had severe impacts on nearly every business which relies on social interaction and events.

My third site of interest is Bohemian Grove, located in the basement of an apartment in the same area of Brooklyn, to me it exemplifies the "old school" DIY venue. Finding the venue can prove tricky to those who aren't "in the know", as the address is often passed on through word-of-mouth, and the posters for shows there usually include the phrase "dm the bands for addy". This phrase is shorthand for "contact the band for the address", as the space is located in someone's residential apartment. To get into the venue itself, one must walk down a narrow and slightly treacherous flight of stairs, and enter a rather narrow doorway. Once there, concert goers are greeted by one of the people who lives there, and they will tell you the price for entry, which is usually no more than ten dollars, and runs on a sliding scale for those who might not be able to afford that. Then they will stamp the top of the person's hand to show that they paid. The venue space itself is quite dark, and has a rather strong smell of must. It is a dirty old basement after all.

The floors are a dusty concrete and the graffiti covered walls appear as if they could collapse at any moment. There is a small makeshift bar located in the back, which serves cheap liquor (the cocktail options are coke or cranberry mixers with whatever liquor they have) and single cans of PBR. They do have a bathroom, which is a single toilet and sink situation where the door is questionable and the walls are also covered with graffiti and stickers. There is no noticeable stage to speak of, so audience members usually crowd as close as safely possible to the bands performing. Bohemian Grove is probably one of very few venues like this still holding shows in this "post-peak pandemic" era, as many house venues shut their doors either for safety or economic reasons. It fills me with a sense of hope for the future that Bohemian Grove continues to host shows that remind me so much of the DIY scene I first encountered in 2018.

My interlocuters for this study come from a variety of backgrounds and engagements with the DIY scene in New York. Interviews were conducted through the online platform of Zoom to account for issues of physical distance as well as safety in regards to the COVID-19 pandemic. Their personal recounts of their time as concert goers, band members, and organizers help to paint a clearer picture of what it means to a part of this practice during such an uncertain time in all of our lives. It is my hope, that through our engagements and interactions with local live music, that together we build an understanding of the importance of spaces like these for the creation of community and proliferation of alternative forms of musical practice.

Chapter 4: DIY as a Practice

The acronym DIY, which literally means "Do it Yourself", comes with many different connotations. One can see it while walking through a Lowes or Home Depot as a way to describe a home improvement project that can be done without fancy equipment and contractors, or even as a way to talk about recipes. However, for generations of people who have sought music and music scenes that aren't part of the mainstream top 40, DIY has come to mean more than just "doing it yourself". It encompasses a wide range of social relations, ways to consume and produce music, expressions of individuality and political idea's, and an overall desire to make and participate in a culture and community that represents who they are. However, the questions that arise are; what is the "doing" in DIY? Are you really doing it "yourself"? and what is "it"? I hope to answer these questions, and more, through my own encounters with these scene's, and present the idea that DIY is more than a community, or a "genre" (which I would argue it is not at all), but a practice. A practice that, when done with care and attention to the wants and needs of a community, brings people together for the love of the music that is being shared.

I will be looking at one sub-section of the New York City DIY scene which I have participated in and studied closely since the fall of 2018. This community, as David has expressed to me, was built off of the memory of Silent Barn. Silent Barn was a popular DIY venue that was located in Bushwick and closed in April of 2018 due to financial hardships as well as the economic issues associated with gentrification. In regards to the community that followed, David has told me that one of his fist times at a show in the DIY scene was in fact one of the last shows that Silent Barn had, stating that, "We were all chasing what that was. We modeled everything after that. It was really something we couldn't quite get again, and maybe that's okay, but it was nice… that's all we knew, and it closed down three days later" (David

2022). This story of the venue closing down shortly after ones first time there is not one that is unfamiliar with many people who frequent DIY music venues. I personally have quite a bad track record with DIY music venues, as many of the ones I would go to would close down very shortly after my first time attending a show there. However, it is notable that regardless of how long the venue is there for, or how many times a person was able to attend a show there, they still continue to impact our lives in the DIY community. From David's first interactions with Silent Barn going on to shape a whole community's basis for how they put on shows, to my first time attending a show which would later go on to influence everything I've decided to study in my undergraduate studies, these shows have a long-lasting impact on the people who attend them. The question as to what is DIY in today's context remains; How does it manifest in today's post pandemic world?

To understand what DIY means in the present, it is helpful to understand what it has meant to people in the past. Not the distant past of a post 1960's anti-hippie scene, but the recent past. One which I was an active member in, even if only for a brief passing of time. The first show I ever went to was in 2018, in a house venue that I can't even remember the name of. I do remember the feeling of a total embrace of strangers. Practically no one knew who I was in this darkly lit, second floor apartment. It was hard to make out any ones faces in fact. The hallways were narrow, and the place was crowded with teenagers and a few people in their early to mid-twenties, just chatting over the hum of the soundcheck. Even though I didn't really know anyone there, it wasn't that difficult to get to know a lot of people, really fast, even if just to know them for one night. I didn't know what to expect from the music and the different bands playing, only that my friend David, an extremely talented guitarist, was in one of them. What I found out was that there was not one solid way for me to describe the types of sounds and visuals that I

encountered that night. Nothing sat still in a perfect frame of style, genre, or presentation. Some sets elicited moshing, screeching chords of electric guitars and the booms and crashes of an overworked drum kit. Other sets were just one person and a guitar, calming the waters, and lulling everyone to sit down and pay attention to the performer and their instrument.

This musical world I have described is flooded with individuals who have had many similar influential encounters with the scene. One such individual is Alicia, now a first-year undergrad student, was only a freshman in high school when I met her at the first show I ever went to. She was one of the first people I remember meeting, and little did I know, I would keep seeing her again and again. Alicia is a young artist who practically grew up in the New York DIY scene, and has told me in a recent phone call we had that the scene was,

> "…influential because it was the first social group I had that wasn't really tied to an institution. I was still in high school and I was in freshman year. That was the first time I had a group of friends who were not all in on the same playing field as me, like in the same grade or same age. I got to see what the next steps could be for me in terms of art. I knew people there who were showing art who were already in college" (Alicia 2022).

For Alicia, this was a place where she could have a community that wasn't tied to and obligation, but rather to common interests and passions. She went on to tell me that she even wrote her college essays on the DIY scene, and how it influenced her as an artist and a person. Her experience in this scene, as well as what has been described to me by David, and my own personal experience is in conversations with notions made by Dawson Barrett in his essay on DIY and its interactions with direct action politics. As mentioned earlier in this study, Barret discusses the idea that DIY and punk spaces are seen as "pre-political phenomena" which lead to the creation of individuals personal identities, purpose and meaning (Barret 2013: 25). While he

does offer a criticism to this notion, as he sees these spaces as being more inherently political, this idea of the pre-political phenomenon is inherent in the experiences that my interlocutors have described.

For David, entering the DIY scene and finding this community of people that welcomed him with such kindness, impacted not just his personal life, but his entire life in this scene going forward. From his one short lived experience at Silent Barn, he gained access to a community of like-minded musicians, and though this was able to start his own band and create the music he wanted to hear in the world. Thus, out of DIY scene's he carved out his identity of musician, and was able to cultivate his passions for music making, such that he is currently a student in the composition program at Brooklyn College. For Alicia, this encounter with the so-called pre-political phenomenon of DIY spaces runs somewhat deeper, as her beginnings at The Living Gallery jump-started the way she interacts in the world socially. Entering a community such as this at such an early age helped her find her way in a way that obligatory institutions such as school would not have been able to do. For example, by the age of fifteen, Alicia was commissioned by the Living Gallery to paint a mural on their storefront, and in return was allowed to host a show there for free (as the venue usually charges a small fee to rent the space). With this free night she organized a solo art show, where she showed portraits she had done of her friends in the DIY scene. She also invited some friends to perform their music later on in the show. I also happened to be at that show, and getting to be a part of such a formative moment in her life showed me just how important these spaces and networks of artists are to the young people who frequent this scene.

Connecting this back to Barret's discussion of the pre-political phenomena and his further disagreement with this assertion, I argue that both the pre-political theorization and his

arguments against such a theory are at play here. For my interlocuters, as well as for myself, this specific DIY scene presents a community of people with which it was possible for us to explore our identities in relation to music, and to find a home base in a community that shares common interests in music tastes, expressions of style, and an overall openness to different kinds of people. Furthermore, Barret's argument beyond this phenomenon, that punk and DIY's ethos is more focused on a tendency towards direct action also applies. His furthering of the idea of DIY and punk as a participatory practice demands that those involved in such scenes, "…move beyond the role of consumers and instead become actively involved…", much in the ways that myself and my interlocuters have (Barret 26: 2013). Whether it's through the organization of personal art shows and musical performances, the formation of bands, or even just the pursuit of understanding the ways this community works in hopes to further the organizing work done by those who have come before, DIY is more than an acronym. Through these engagements, it is apparent that DIY is not a genre or a "vibe", but a practice. A practice of repetition and recreation of the ethos of community.

4b: Gentrification in The Time of COVID

The urban landscape of New York City has been undergoing rapid changes for decades. Generations of New Yorkers have their own stories of "what it was like when I was kid", and constantly say things like, "You would not be able to recognize this neighborhood if you saw it back in the day". Now, at the young age of twenty-one I find myself saying the same things. The thing I find most striking about this, is that I am saying this with under twenty years of conscious experience living in New York, while my parents and older colleagues seem to only have taken up such statements at later points in their life. Is this somewhat subjective observation merely some showing of my adolescent ignorance, or does it point to a more frightening reality. It may

be some combination of the latter; however, it does appear that stark changes to the makeup of the city and its boroughs are happening at a rapid pace. Most crucial to this study, is the ways in which the overall gentrification of neighborhoods, which has been accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, affects the New York DIY scene.

Gentrification is nothing new to New York, or any other urban area. It is the economic, political, and social force which constantly threatens the livelihoods of communities and the housing security of families and often disenfranchised populations. When it comes to small-scale DIY music scenes, it is the force which threatens the overall life span of venues, as well as housing for local musicians and artists. What I'm describing here is nothing new. Whether it's the Lower East Side, Williamsburg, or Park Slope, now more than ever, it's easy to spot the process of gentrification active in a neighborhood. It grows like a cancer, moving from one neighborhood to the next, and next on the list seems to be Bushwick. It is surely not the only neighborhood experiencing this process in New York, however it is one which has been a hub for the New York DIY scene in recent years. The first show I ever went to, as well as my interlocuters' first shows, were all in Bushwick. Currently, many of the venues we frequented have since been shut down, bought out, and more than likely demolished to make way for the next wave of high rises and luxury apartments. This study works to understand how the combined events of gentrification and COVID-19 have affected the DIY scene and those who participate in it.

The earlier claim that the process of gentrification appears to have been accelerated does not come without on the ground data to back it up. In addition to my own observation of this as a long time New York native, I interviewed a colleague of mine, Giselle, who is currently working for a New York legal services group. This group is a major nonprofit that is located in every

borough, and she works in the tenants' rights coalition. This department offers aggressive litigation to prevent development and protect people so that they can stay in their homes. When I asked her about the link between COVID-19 and the process of gentrification she informed me that when the pandemic hit, "…no one really knew what was going on with the courts, so if you were in the middle of a repairs case, you didn't know what was going to happen. It definitely delayed the process of repairs, and contributed to the number of fires that we saw during the pandemic because of these combinations of repairs that are long overdue" (Giselle: 2022). In this case she is referring to cases of eviction that come about due to landlord's improper maintenance of buildings, leading to tenants' homes becoming unlivable, forcing them out, and leading to the common case of the building being sold and developed into luxury apartments or office buildings, with rents tripled from what they once were. While this is a more destructive example of tenant displacement, there is another way in which this displacement occurs which is directly connected to economics and finance. That is the dissolution of COVID eviction protection programs.

Prior to the pandemic, tenants who required short term financial assistance for their rents were able to apply for what is called a one-shot deal. The way Giselle described it to me, one-shot deals have been in place for a while, and provide aid for short term financial emergencies. However, when the pandemic started, the state got rid of the one-shot deal and replaced it with the Emergency Rental Assistance program. She describes the difference between the two like this;

> "The one-shot deal is where you can ask to get everything that you owe because of an emergency like the pandemic. Like, "I lost my job, now that I have this new job I can afford to pay rent moving forward, can I get this one-shot deal to forgive X amount that I

owe", and that's how we did it before. Now with the pandemic, one-shot deals were removed, and was replaced by ERAP, which is less secure than the one-shot deal. ERAP is a specific amount of money that has come and gone, the money is no longer there. The State makes it very clear that the funds have been long gone, and if anything, they are in debt" (Giselle: 2022).

What she points out here is that by replacing the one-shot deal with ERAP, the government has taken away a secure financial assistance program with one which had a finite amount of funds that has run out long before the effects of the pandemic have subsided. Furthermore, she has explained to me that those who already receive some form of financial assistance were put on the bottom of the list for consideration for ERAP, meaning that the people who need assistance the most are more likely to not have access to it. The only apparent aid that this program can offer people looking to escape different forms of wrongful evictions is through the twelve-month grace period offered by just applying to ERAP, even though they know there are no funds left in the program. While these twelve months allow tenants the ability to look for new housing, or better paying jobs, the unavoidable outcome of eviction still remains, as Giselle states, "In January the eviction protection ended. Right now, we are just starting to see so many letters and eviction notices go out, and everyone is starting to really feel the pressure, because now there are deadlines" (Giselle: 2022). Now, the process that was already underway in many neighborhoods all across New York, has picked up in record time, as the effects of COVID-19 have ravaged New York's most vulnerable communities. But how does this affect DIY?

The way the common narrative goes, artists and young musicians often move to lower income neighborhoods, as those are the rents they are able to afford. A lot of the time the blame for gentrification gets put on them, and while their presence isn't necessarily helpful, they are not

the direct cause, as one can see from the interaction recounted above. Regardless of this, these young artists set up shop in these neighborhoods, and their homes and workshops become the spaces in which venues exist. Therefore, the aforementioned process of gentrification goes far beyond the decisions of the individual actors. This is not to say they are fully without some stake in the process. As Sarah Schulman writes it is a, "…concrete replacement process. Physically it is an urban phenomenon: the removal of communities of diverse classes, ethnicities, races, sexualities, languages, and points of view from the central neighborhoods of cities, and their replacement by more homogenized groups" (Shulman 2012: 14). The artists who move in and host shows in these neighborhoods are not homogenizing the community. Ideally, they become part of the community by interacting with local businesses and supporting the local economy. It is what comes after the artists that introduces this homogenizing factor. The aspects of gentrification that have been described by Giselle, in which landlords end up selling their properties to real-estate developers, leads to the construction of the glass and steel high rises in Brooklyn and other boroughs that one would associate more with areas like Midtown Manhattan. Furthermore, the venue for the artists and musicians becomes collateral damage of this aspect of the changing urban landscape.

4c: New York's Children- What it Means to "Be From Here"

As can be seen throughout the history of punk and DIY overall, there has been a continuing theme of youth subcultures growing up, and "becoming", during historical periods that have presented them with uncertain futures. Whether it is because of the political, sociological, or economic realities which they were faced with, the uncertainty which I locate here as a trope lead various youth subcultures towards punk and DIY aesthetics of musical community across the nation.

In the case of the community at the center of this study, we are a generation of New Yorkers who grew up in post-9/11 New York City, born into a crumbling urban landscape riddled with pockets of rapid gentrification. As children we experienced US intervention in countless conflicts involving the middle-east, most infamously the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, watched as our parents struggled through the 2008 economic recession, and entered young adulthood under the Trump administration. More recently, as we gained a greater political consciousness, we have born witness to and directly participated in the racial reckonings that have come with the rise and continued efforts of the BLM movement, as well as the ever-looming Climate Crisis which threatens the world. All of this combined has created a generation of youth whose futures seem more and more uncertain every day, whether its world war, national politics, widespread disease, or the decline of the ecosystem. For this generation, and more specifically this local musical community, growing up in a city that in many ways has been a cultural hub throughout each of the aforementioned conflicts has had an undeniable effect on the subcultures that have arose within the community. Furthermore, I would argue that it has given this community the ability to exist in a constant state of change and becoming, as the fast-paced nature of the New York Metropolitan area has often become the locus of conversation between my peers and I, as well as with my interlocutors for this study.

When discussing the differences that David see's within New York music culture between people born and raised in New York, and people who moved to the city from some undefined suburban local or another city he said,

> "I made it a point to tell my new band that we're a band that are all NY born and raised, nobody from outside, so we all know and have the same opinion on gentrification…I really think when it comes to musical identity, a lot of these cities have a specific sound.

You can't just go from another state and come in and say "Yeah, we're a New York band". It doesn't work like that, you don't know what it's like. You only have this spoon-fed version of what it's like growing up here. Because, we –both you and I– live extremely fast paced lives here in New York. We have no place to go to kind of relax except for prospect park, and we both know how that is. There are little things about when you write music about yourself, about where you're living, about what your experience is, that is so specific to where you're from and you can almost consider it cultural to an extent" (David, 2021).

In this account of David's interaction with his new band, and what it means to them musically to be from New York, one can see how the fast-paced nature of growing up in a place like New York is considered heavily in what it means for their identity. In seeing it as cultural, David places this experience as one which becomes universal in the culture of the scene, and of people with similar backgrounds more generally.

When the pandemic hit, many organizers and artists had to re-conceptualize what a show would like in a global pandemic. At first, the physical space of the venue was transposed to the virtual world of online shows and livestreams. Whether they took shape in the form of a zoom concert, twitch livestream, Minecraft server, or a pre-recorded broadcast of the band/s, musicians and their audiences from all spheres of the musical world made the switch to online events. While this was a decent band-aid solution to the socially distanced, quarantined world we inhabited for many months, it proved tiring, often times dull, and lacking the intimacy that comes with live music. For New York DIY in particular, this mode of performance appeared to be extremely short lived, as many of us in the scene recall very few instances of virtual concerts during this time. However, with the warmer summer weather in 2020, those who were willing,

cautiously stepped outside at an attempt for a revitalization of the scene. However, Alicia's recount of that summer paints an interesting picture at this attempt to return to some form of musical "normalcy",

> "There was kind of like a collapse of that community that was driven by external circumstances. But it seemed like what came after that- summer of 2020—At that point I think a lot of shows, a lot of outdoor things that I went to at some point, it really seemed that it was not as much of a community feel anymore because people were just looking for something to do. There were a lot of really large crowds that were drawn, and some were a lot bigger than I had ever seen at a DIY venue due to the physical limitations of an indoor space versus Tompkins. But because of that it was never as close physically and no longer as close in terms of people's reasoning for being there" (Alicia, 2022).

In this recount of that summer, Alicia senses that the lack of physical closeness, coupled with the necessity to go to a public outdoor space, in a lot of ways, dissolved the ability to make connections in the ways she once did prior to the pandemic.

In the previous example, people are simply attracted to the idea of something to do socially. This is in opposition to the scene Alicia remembers, which is the tight-knit communities of concert goers who would attend shows to hear new music and support local artists. This is not to say the desire to be social is inherently bad, however, it becomes detrimental to the goals of DIY communities. Such goals, as laid out by my interlocuters, include; publicizing musicians and artists, finding and appreciating new music, creating community among like-minded individuals who may or may not have it elsewhere, and ensuring that artists and musicians are paid for their work through the collection of door fees (Alicia, David: 2022).

This lack of physical proximity is a phenomenon that has come up time and time again in discussions of how live music has been affected by COVID, specifically in smaller scenes, such as this DIY community. Furthermore, as COVID related quarantine has caused a gap in what some might call institutional memory, that is the handing down of practices across generations, the ways in which this community organizes and participates with each other have become lost in nostalgia.

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4d: Transing the Venue

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The idea of a DIY venue, at its core, is not one with an exact physical definition to begin with. The spaces in which these shows take place can range from clubs and "venues" built out of converted warehouses or storefronts, to the dark damp basement of a few local artists who set up a performance, or even just someone's apartment with amps set up next to the couch in their living room. From this description alone, one can see the mutability of the identity of the physical space of venues, as they are places often transformed from their original intended use. To discuss the mutable nature of the venue I will begin with a discussion of the ways in which the COVID-19 pandemic caused musical communities globally to shift to virtual events at an attempt to continue the proliferation of live music. I will then move this discussion to focus on a specific instance in which I noticed the power that the DIY community holds to transform spaces, even for a brief moment, into what one could recognize as a DIY space.

This is not to say that all has been lost, rather that COVID, as well as other extenuating circumstances, have pushed the DIY scene into a transitory period. Venues which were once frequented heavily by older member of the scene (i.e. Alicia and David), have since been shut down, demolished, or just stopped having concerts all together. The people who were once familiar faces have gone off to college, started working on more personal projects, or chose life

paths that have taken them away from the city. However, with the introduction of vaccines and nationwide shaky return to what some call "normalcy", live shows in this community have slowly been returning.

By summer 2021, about a year and half since the beginning of the pandemic, life reluctantly began to resemble some semblance of the way it was pre-pandemic. While the reality of COVID was, and still is, nowhere close to an end, the vaccines allowed people to move more freely in the world. Bars, clubs, restaurants, stadiums, music festivals and large-scale social gatherings began to come out of the woodwork with varying degrees of mask and vaccine requirements. In most places where people would be mask-less, proof of vaccination, and more recently booster vaccines, became a requirement for entry. I spent that summer living and working in Oberlin, Ohio, observing the New York social scene from a distance. In Ohio I was able to attend a variety of small basement shows in the college town I stayed in. The experience in and of itself gave me social whiplash. Going from serious quarantine, where the most social interaction I had was making dinner with my roommates, to being packed in a college kids cold dark brick basement, surrounded by a sea of sweaty strangers, my brain didn't have time to process this drastic change of scenery. It all meshed into a foggy blur of faces, neon lights, and nostalgic flashbacks to dimly lit Bushwick avenues flooded with muffled sounds of screeching guitars and young bodies bouncing off each other in the mosh pits. For that to be my experience in a small rural town in the Midwest, I couldn't even fathom what it would be like in the metropolitan hub of New York City.

Form social media alone, it appeared that the DIY community began to have more and more live shows, with a mix of indoor and outdoor venues. David, however reluctantly, began to return to the live music scene, expressing particular appreciation for a place called The Tea

Room. It is not specifically recognized as a venue, but rather as an apartment complex that is entirely populated by musicians. Because of this, they are able to practice whenever they desire, "… and no one complains about the sound levels because everyone's a musician. So, everyone is on the same page" (David: 2022). David also informed me that The Tea Room also has places set up in the basement and on the roof for people to perform, and they would host shows on the roof throughout the summer. He sees these rooftop shows as a good medium for the pandemic, as David often alludes to his pandemic induced anxiety around being in indoor venues. However, it is not just the outdoor nature of The Tea Room that has drawn David, and others like him, but also the semi-private aspect of the apartment complex. Thus, it appears that The Tea Room's rooftop offers a solution to the issues Alicia saw in park shows. This semi-private aspect, meaning that one must be seeking out live music for the sake of live music, is able to foster a community of people that resembles what this DIY community looked like pre-pandemic.

Upon my return from the Midwest, I was eager to see what this new mode of New York DIY looked like. The first thing that I found to be different, was the frequency of shows, or more so the lack-there-of. When I first started attending DIY shows, there was at least one every night during the summer months, if not more. Furthermore, the myriad of sounds and styles of music being performed at any given show enabled one to experience the gritty growl of hardcore rock on the same bill as folk inspired melancholy indie rock and shimmery electronic punk. What I came home to was a barren landscape of what I once knew, spotted with glimmering mirages of familiar sounds. I eagerly scrolled through the social media pages of any and all people, venues and bands that I thought would have some information for shows happening before my untimely return to college. Finally, I found out that Hello Mary, a decently well-known band in the scene, was playing a show at Elsewhere in Brooklyn. It seemed odd to me that this very young local

band, who I've only known to play in basements and house venues, would suddenly be playing at a mid-tier legit venue like Elsewhere. I shrugged it off and reluctantly bought my, not so cheap, ticket through an online third-party ticket seller.

The concert took place on a classically hot and sticky August night in New York. The trains carried me there, bringing with them the oh so familiar stenches that get brought out by the late summer heat. Once off the train I made my way through the maze of industrial buildings that line that particular area of Bushwick, every once and a while passing by sparkling small restaurants and bars that seemed out of place next to the run-down warehouses. Elsewhere itself is located in what appears to be a converted warehouse space, it's exterior walls either painted matte white or black, so as to distinguish it from the surrounding red brick buildings. After waiting on the surprisingly long line, two large security guards checked my ID and vaccine card, gave me a wristband indicating that I was 21+ and let me in through the steel gates towards the ticket check. My e-ticket was scanned and I was admitted into one of the three venue spaces where they host concerts and DJ/Club nights.

The Hello Mary concert was located in their smallest venue, Zone 1, which had a decently large stage, fully stocked bar, and a dance floor that could fit about 250 people comfortably. The room started to slowly fill with people, and I watched as the neon purple lights illuminated the mask less faces of concert goers, who for the most part appeared to all be complete strangers to each other. The crowed appeared to be made mostly of "hip" young twenty-somethings, decked out in light floral summery shirts, and pretty basic apparel of baggy pants/shorts and tight cropped tank tops. A few younger looking people standing towards the back middle of the room stood out to me particularly as they donned a more punk/DIY aesthetic of mesh clothing, bits of leather and torn fabrics, steel spiked accessories, and striking hairstyles

in a rainbow of different colors. I didn't approach them, however, their presence in the space jolted my senses as they stood out not just for their appearance but also for their activities. While everyone surrounding them was standing in small insular groups, having hushed conversations and quietly sipping their drinks, this group was sitting in a somewhat open circle exchanging and reading zines. This group embodied the juxtaposition of a punk/DIY ethos against that of the "cool/cold" twenty-somethings who appeared to be there because it was something to do.

As the room slowly filled to max capacity, the overhead lights went down and the stage lights shot on, announcing the arrival of the opening band. When I saw who was opening for Hello Mary, I was confused and somewhat amused. It was a three-person band, comprised of two men and one woman, all who must have been at least over 50. The two older men played guitar and bass, and the woman played the drums. Their music sounded like what I can only describe as a fusion of Sonic Youth and Grateful Dead cover bands. Standing there and listening to them play long drawn out guitar riffs, muffled with one too many fuzz pedals, producing a dissonance that sounded unintentional, I was not thoroughly impressed or excited. They played a thirty-minute set of psychedelic fuzz rock, all the while the crowd was either quietly swaying and nodding their heads to the drum beat, or frequenting the bars and outdoor smoking areas. Once their set was over, the drummer went to the mic and revealed to us that she was the mother of one of the girls in Hello Mary. After my initial surprise subsided in record time, the whole event started to make sense to me. It became much clearer to me how a small local punk band could play at a place like Elsewhere after a rather short stint in the DIY house show circuit.

After the opening band got off stage, the bright overhead lights came back on, and the sea of people began to rustle from their post-psyche rock haze moving between the bar and the bathrooms. A few late comers flowed through the doors and the stage was rearranged to

accommodate Hello Mary's set up for mics and amps. The intermission was brief, and as the lights dimmed once again, the audience pooled into the center of the dancefloor, concentrating towards the area in front of where the lead singer's mic would be. Hello Mary began their set, changing the tone of the night entirely with a somewhat fuzzy yet poignant guitar tone, and very clear lyricism that strung words of friendships, relationships, hate, anger, apathy and angst in a poetic flow. The drums and bass providing the strong foundation, with moments of impressive virtuosity of rhythm.

Throughout their set, their overall sound brought me back to a pre-COVID soundscape of the New York City DIY scene. Their raw yet smooth vocals and shimmery gritty tones brought up images of the grimy basements and graffiti lined sidewalks and walls of venues that only exist today in memory. Modulating between fast paced punchy choruses and drawn out, yet elegant, ballads of the growing pains of young adulthood, they brought the scene to the stage. This was made even more apparent by the audience, as for the first time in months, I was thrown into a mosh pit. The punks I noticed before were thrashing and headbanging, all the while being careful not to headbutt or punch people nearby. Bodies slammed into each other, expressing a release of pent up energy and emotion, while the people on the outskirts of the pit created a sort of human wall that shielded people who did not want to mosh and lightly pushing rogue moshers back in the pit. This one instance brought me the sense of electric joy and adrenaline I had been missing.

Bringing this into conversation with the works of Prosser, this moment represents a crossing of boundaries, between the commercial aesthetics of Elsewhere and the DIY aesthetics of Hello Mary. Prosser sees, "…transition as a geographic trope…a passage through space, a journey from one location to another", which when thinking about this instance of transformation, further deepens the actions of these punk teens, (Prosser 1998: 5). I am arguing

here that, Hello Mary's presence in a space like Elsewhere attests to a mutability of DIY aesthetics, such that, for a brief moment Elsewhere became a DIY venue. Hello Mary's angry-girl punk sound mixed with the presence of that group of punk teens who started the mosh, brought DIY to Zone 1. In this way, they transformed, the venue into a space where DIY aesthetics and values can exist, even for a moment.

This vignette to my return to the New York scene after the first wave of COVID-19 shows one example of the ways in which the demise of many DIY venues has had an effect on the proliferation of the scene overall. With the fact that there are less and less small DIY venues, bands, like Hello Mary, may turn towards the mid-tier venues which cater to a completely different kind of audience than the bands initial audiences. This is not to say that Hello Mary is a "sell out" by any means, but more so that when it comes to making music, the aspect of the commercial is always there. Whether you are producing music for your local scene, or for the ears of strangers in Elsewhere, there is still a product, in a sense, that is being distributed. That product being a combination of the band's music and their overall image.

4e: A Blast From The Past

I spent the next few months scouring the internet for shows that would take place in more traditionally "DIY" locales with little to no success. There were a few here and there, however, balancing work and school made them nearly impossible to get to. My suspicions were confirmed by David when he told me the scene was "pretty dry" these days. There were a couple shows for Halloween weekend, but they were shut down pretty quickly by the cops because of noise complaints. As COVID boosters began to be administered there was another noticeable increase in shows and events happening, but not as frequently as they used to. After a long few months and multiple phone calls with David, I was all set to see his new band, Wince, perform

their first set as a band in mid-December. I embarked on the ritual like trek back home to Brooklyn for winter break, my mind buzzing with excitement as I anticipated my return to the scene I know and love. I was in Brooklyn for less than twenty-four hours when I got a news notification that the Omicron variant was spreading rapidly throughout the city, causing the emergency closure of numerous bars, clubs and restaurants. Therefore, it was no surprise when I got the text from David that the show was cancelled indefinitely, as we waited for this new surge in cases to go down.

While Omicron put a pause on the long-awaited return of live music, it did not take long for them to come back this time. By February, I was already begging to see posters for events circulating the social media pages of bands and venues. As for Wince, they were gearing up to play their first set again, this time with major success. While I was not able to make it to their debut, I did get to see their second performance, which happened to be in one of the few DIY venues left from a time before COVID. The venue is called Bohemian Grove, and it is located in the basement of a residential house in Bushwick. It is run by the people who live in the house, and still operates under the traditional "pay what you can" (in cash only) model for entry. Taking the familiar train rout to the Gates Avenue stop on the L train and passing the corner deli down the empty Brooklyn streets, I was hit with the reality of the situation. Almost exactly two years prior, I made the very same journey into Bushwick. At the time, I was just going to hang out with my friends and listen to some exciting new music. Little did I know, it would be the last DIY show I would attend before a global pandemic put our lives on an indefinite pause. Now two years have passed and I have found myself walking the same streets, to see the same people, and listen to exciting new music. Even though I had found myself in a nearly identical situation, this

last show comes with the heaviness of a pandemic, but also a new form of appreciation for the ability to be in the same space with this community.

When I arrived to the front gate of the house, I was welcomed by the sight of two small groups of teens and young adults smoking and chatting in the front yard. They had a grunge punk look to them, each with their own personal styles of leather, torn denim and a myriad of accessories. Walking down the steep, dimly lit stairs to the basement, I tripped and almost faceplanted on the concrete, which funnily enough is exactly what happened the last time I was there. The first person I saw when I walked in was David. We greeted each other with huge smiles, and a long hug, as we hadn't seen each other in person for two years. Even though so much time had passed since the last time we saw each other, we both felt as though we somehow looked the same. It was as if time stopped in 2020, lulling us into a deep sleep throughout the nightmarish dreamscape of the pandemic, and we awoke on the other side in 2022. What struck me the most is that, much like the feeling David and I shared, the venue also felt as if it had entered the dreamscape with us. The walls were still covered with graffiti, the air filled with cigarette smoke, and same smell of mildew permeated the air. The only thing that seemed physically different was that the lid had now completely fallen off of the toilet in what can loosely be described as the bathroom.

When Wince's set began, the overly crowded basement lit up with energy and excitement. In a matter of seconds every person there was walking towards the direction of the music. The ceilings were so low, and many people in the crowd were so tall, that the mass of people who made up the audience became an impermeable wall of bodies. Only a single horizontal beam of light from the stage area could escape from the space above their heads. This did not seem to matter one bit as the first few notes of a song reverberated loudly off of the

walls, attacking our eardrums with a barrage of heavy, but slow, rock music. The tempo picked up quickly, and in an instant a large mish pit formed in the center of the crowed. I watched as people threw their bodies erratically at one another, flailing limbs going in every possible direction to the beat of the drums and bass. Much like the pit I described at the Hello Mary show, people in and around the pit watched out for one another. At one point, three rather tall people fell on top of each other right next to me. I quickly extended a hand to each person, lifting them up and quickly making sure they were okay. After a brief thanks, they went right back in the pit, unphased by what just happened, in pursuit of that physical release prompted by the screeching heavy metal bouncing off the walls.

Throughout these accounts of the return of live music, I am describing the ways in which this DIY community has adapted to their current situation. How they have responded to COVID, rapid gentrification, and the circumstances of everyday life, comes through in the different venues they are playing in, as well as the ways audiences interact in these venues. From their short-lived move to the world of livestreamed events online, various iterations of outdoor concerts, the entrance of local DIY bands to more mainstream music venues, to house shows that have the closest resemblance to the pre-pandemic scene; the New York DIY scene has persisted. In this persistence the scene has displayed how DIY, as a practice, participates in theories of transness, as its presence in a venue actively transforms the physical, social, and auditory realms of these spaces.

Chapter 5: Cultural Memory and Present Realities

From the moment COVID sent the world into quarantined isolation, to the present moment in which I am writing about all that has happened since, one question has loomed in the minds of both my interlocuters and myself; What is the current state of DIY, and how will it continue? While COVID and gentrification remain as arbiters of uncertainty for the future of this community, there are glimmers of hope, line with harsh realities, which provide insights into what this scene has become. Juxtaposing what it once was, to what we can scrape together from the rubble we have left, one can see just how much things have changed in two years. While this may not seem surprising considering the fast-paced lifestyle of New Yorkers, it is the changes themselves that have affected the DIY community the most.

In the absence of a tangible scene during the onset of the pandemic, many of its crucial social actors, such as organizers and well-known band members, drifted away. The relentless force of time reared its head, and as years progressed people got older, went away to college, moved to another state, or began working on different personal projects and careers. This is not to place blame on them, rather it is to explain how the cultural memory of the scene becomes lost in the storm. In this context, cultural memory serves as a term to encompass common practices of people in scene. Such practices include; booking shows, hosting shows, playing in bands, forming bands, aesthetics of presentation and fashion, audience and band interactions during and after performances etc. When the pandemic put a pause on live music, these practices ceased, and so the younger generation of DIY youths in the city were not able to fully immerse themselves in this world.

During this physical absence they turned to the internet and social media to access representations of the scene. Platforms like Instagram and Tik Tok serve as a cultural archive

through which people who may not have been in the scene prior could access videos, pictures, and links to bands various streaming profiles. This is somewhat of a double edge sword. On the one hand, it's genuinely amazing that even in its absence local DIY scenes and the bands in them were being accessed by the next generation of teens and young adults who have interests in DIY culture. However, they were only accessing a one-dimensional image of what happens in the scene. How could they discern what happens behind the scenes, or even the intimate interactions had in mosh pits and in-between sets. Because of this, I argue that this is a loss of cultural memory which in some ways stunts the growth of the scene, but there is a silver lining. Even though there is some cultural dissonance, there is hope in the unknown, as the aforementioned mutability of this scene allows for opportunities for growth and change.

In thinking about what was lost, beyond the tangible losses of venue space and the presence of audiences and bands, my interlocutors locate an ideological loss. When thinking back to the shows that happened in public parks, Alicia finds that, "There was a disintegration of that feeling of accountability that was there when everyone knew each other and we were all in a room together and you see who throws a beer can or something like that. Versus in a park when it's a crowd of 100 people. There is definitely a dissolution of that and of people holding on to the point of putting on a show" (Alicia: 2022). In this example of accountability on the basis of physical safety, Alicia notices that as the scene has dispersed and changed the overall ethos of DIY has become muddied by the ways it is being interacted with now. In a previously mentioned account from her, she discusses how these types of shows felt as if they were held just to bring out as many people as possible, rather than to bring people together for the sake of music and community. In noticing this danger to the image of DIY in the lack of accountability, Alicia is in conversation with Dawson Barrett's analysis of DIY and Punk collectives. In his essay he points

out the defining principles of DIY are, "to provide a safe atmosphere by confronting violence and oppressive behavior, and to involve each member of the Punk community directly, through a process of consensus-based decision making" (Barrett 2013: 27). Here, Barrett establishes safety and community as defining principles of DIY that take place around the music. When juxtaposed to Alicia's account, one can see how these principles, summed up in her terms as "accountability", were not present in this space.

The other aspect of Barrett's principles of DIY that I would like to focus on in this analysis is the involvement of each member of the community directly. For the purposes of this analysis, involvement will be used to describe a wide breadth of interactions with the scene. Furthermore, I will juxtapose involvement with the scene with the phenomena of the poseur. In this context, a poseur (or poser) is someone who attends DIY shows just so they can say they went. Often times they don't care about, or even pay attention to the music. The poseur puts more attention towards making sure others know that they went to the show, in this way, creating a façade of involvement with the scene in order to curate their reputation. It may seem easy to confuse a poseur with someone who is quiet at shows, or prefers to remain on the outskirts of crowds, however I have found this not to be the case. People who are quiet at shows are just as engaged as those who mosh or socially engage with everybody there, because they are noticeably engaged with the music.

5b: The Phenomenon of The Poseur

Thinking back to my first engagements in the scene, I was once the quiet observer at these shows. Entering my first DIY show, I was riddled with social anxiety, as the only person I knew in the sea of people was David. However, this anxiety faded quickly as I took in the scene before me. No one looked at me like they were better than me, or like I didn't belong. Instead,

they introduced themselves to me, and asked what brought me there that night. They made me feel welcomed in the space while allowing me to engage with the music in my own way. In my discussions with David on how people interact at shows he expressed to me, "I have no problem with people being quiet [at a show] but, when you talk to someone who looks at you as if you're just beneath, you're not even worth the time to go. I think that is such a huge juxtaposition to what I saw at silent barn" (David: 2022). In this description, David makes the distinction that a sense of superiority is one defining aspect of poseurs in the scene. This aspect of poseurs can be juxtaposed to the ways that Barrett describes power structures in DIY communities like 924 Gillman and ABC No Rio. He says that, "…punk rock is also, by definition, a participatory movement. Punk's DIY ethos demands that participants move beyond the role of consumers and instead become actively involved by distributing self-produced zines, organizing…, or starting their own bands…" (Barrett 2013: 26). This ethos is one which champions a horizontal structure for leadership and power. This means that responsibilities, organizing, and the overall means of production are shared amongst volunteers and active members of the community. Furthermore, a horizontal structure such as the one described here does not work if people in the community hold a sense of superiority over others.

Furthering this discourse on involvement and superiority in relation to the image of the poseur, it is important in this moment to bring back David's analysis of the differences between "gentrifiers" and New York locals. He marks the gentrifier as a person who comes in with a "spoon-fed" idea of what it is to grow up in New York which can come through in their expressions of music and art. In asking him to clarify what he means by this, he described an art exhibition he stumbled upon in the city one day,

"Here's an example of an art exhibition, and this goes for venues as well. I saw this art

installation while I was walking by, of fluorescent lighting and neon stuff. It was the

worst art I've ever seen in my life. It was just terrible and I just knew it was some sort of

fake New Yorker art thing because New York has all these fluorescent lights and like oh

"this art is about rock music and stuff" and it was just stupid stuff. There's something

about art made in New York by millennial gentrifiers that really rubs me the wrong way

where it is so much on the way things look and the way they look rather than what they

are. You could go with photography; a lot of it just looks like posters and doesn't really

serve any purpose other than looking pretty. I think that's one thing I notice in the music

from people who come here. It just looks pretty or sounds pretty but, there's so much

more to writing music. New York bands don't really voluntarily try to look or sound

pretty all the time. I think that's just something unique to us. A lot of the music is very

dark" (David: 2021).

Here, David points to the applications of surface level aesthetics of the city in art made by

gentrifiers as a misrepresentation of city life. He goes further to pin down how this application of

aesthetics romanticizes the city to such an extent that it erases the truths of what is actually going

on. He furthers his point by juxtaposing it to New York bands, and the ways in which their

musicality doesn't try to clean up the grit. When bands like David's go on stage, there is nothing

polished, perfect, or relatively pretty. Rather, they let out screaming vocals, heavy dirty bass

lines, and fuzzy reverberating wails of electric guitars which are meant to insight chaos in the pit.

Even in their songs inflected with melancholy and angst, there is not a clean tone or timbre in

sight. Placing the poseur in opposition to this scene, David describes this clash of aesthetics

through someone he and his bandmate at the Living Gallery, "Greg was introduced to some guy

who went to FIT from out of state. He said this guy… liked to silently sit aesthetically. He was just sitting there aesthetically… quietly" (David: 2021). In this way, the identities of the "poseur" and the "millennial gentrifier" can be mapped onto each other. This is not to say that these are mutually constitutive categories, rather that they are similar in the ways that they engage with DIY and local music.

The image of aesthetically sitting silently, mixed with complexes of superiority and misrepresentative expressions of art about the city, create an entity which is in direct opposition to the values of DIY communities today and throughout history. I argue that they pose a threat towards DIY going forward, as their co-option of DIY aesthetics and sounds resembles the creation of "alternative" and "indie" as genre markers in the 1990's and early 2000's. Moore argues at the close of his introduction of the rise of 90's alternative, the ways that 90's youth interacted with popular media, consuming it ironically due to their "…prolonged exposure to media and advertising", opened up new avenues for capitalist endeavors in youth-oriented marketing (Moore 2010:118). These new avenues from the 90's, known as "creative capitalism", realized that instead of pushing for the 80's style of, "…hedonism and acquisition…", it would be much more profitable to promote ideas of authenticity in the form of niche markets that could offer the illusion of achieving individuality through participating in this system (Moore 2010: 119). Applying this theory of capitalism onto the current phenomenon of the poseur calls attention to the cyclical nature of the relations of power that exists in the production of mainstream media. By this, I am pointing to the ways that major distributers in any industry of "culture", as seen in the example from the 90's, seeks out niche markets, such as local DIY scenes, in an attempt to profit off of them.

In the process of co-opting DIY scenes, in order to make them marketable to large audiences, the authenticity and individualism each artist pours into their music must get washed away. This washing away of the individual creates a product reminiscent of the art gallery David discussed prior; What is left is a surface-level image of the scene, wiped clean of the dirt and impurities of reality, until what is left is a pretty picture that can be sold on the shelves of Walmart. This action of washing away the individual is in conversation with Sarah Schulman's theory of gentrification. This theory, introduces another way to think about gentrification as the homogenization of a once heterogenous community. Expanding on this notion, Schulman's theory asserts that to gentrify is to remove the mixing of different cultures, ideas, and experiences that once defined what it meant to be "urban" (Schulman 2012: 27). Thus, as the raw unfiltered dissonance of the scene gets homogenized into crisp consonance, they present the illusion of individuality through the appropriation of images and aesthetics found at the core of DIY communities.

5c: DIY Possible Futures

There was a period of time in conducting research for this project where I feared that the New York DIY scene had become yet another casualty of COVID. With the lack of events, and the dispersion of prominent organizers in the scene, it seemed that the fate of the scene was up in the air. I have never been happier to be proven wrong. As mentioned earlier, when the vaccine emerged, local artists and musicians returned from their COVID slumber. The previous chapters analyze what has happened since, and the affect it has had over this DIY community. The intention of this section is to present my interlocuters conception of where they see the scene going in the future. By analyzing what has happened in the past, and juxtaposing that to the present, my interlocuters theorize what is possible for the future. Furthermore, these discussions

of past, present and imagined futures will argue for the importance of DIY musical communities
in youth subcultures.

For me, the scene became a place of escape. An underground paradise of graffiti lined
walls, small dusty basements, and precarious rooftops. Attending multiple shows a week,
meeting multitudes of different people, and being exposed to new music, I found a home in in
the scene. In many ways, this community saved me, because for the first time Brooklyn felt like
a place I wanted to return to. This personal need for the scene is not individual to me as David
and Alicia have both expressed similar feelings. David takes it one step forward, incorporating
live music in general saying, "Live music is so important for the soul… and you can listen to
recordings all you want, but it is so important to have a venue, and one that could facilitate
everyone's needs and help others because, day to day we are always going through so much. I
find it [the venue] as a haven where you could go to, a safe haven to just truly feel more
yourself" (David: 2022). This discussion of the venue as a safe haven is in direct conversation
with Barrett's aforementioned principles of DIY, in which DIY spaces work to stop the spread of
violence and oppression through the care of community. In opening the discussion of the future
of DIY with this description of live music, I am bringing attention to the importance of ensuring
the continuation of DIY communities.

One thing that is crucial for the continuation of any kind of grassroots musical
community or scene is the passing down of cultural memory. The aforementioned loss of this
cultural memory has been used earlier in this study to pinpoint the reasons behind the lack of
accountability my interlocutors have noticed in the scene today. Furthering this notion, I will be
using this generational gap to contextualize the ways in which they perceive the possible futures

of DIY in opposition to the world they created. Alicia brings up this gap in our discussion of the present saying that,

> "I can't name exactly what it is but I have also recognized there's a big generational gap and that's another thing that's preventing any reformation or arising of a similar community. Because it did rely having a variety of people providing a variety of things for one community goal. Now there's no ability to create that kind of relation. Culturally, it seems like a lot of people just stick to hanging out with the people they know. Or driven to go to events that they already know someone at because things are so few and far between, coming back in waves at times and then becoming impossible again, so it's really difficult to see how a community like that could form again within the context of how the world is now. I think that has to be acknowledged, a lot of it was circumstantial based on things that just can't happen anymore. Or that at some point we're a tradition that was broken and can't be reformed" (Alicia: 2022).

In this juxtaposition of the new generation of youths putting on shows to the scene as we once knew it, Alicia points to a cultural shift in these social worlds. However, she is not blaming the people, in as much as she is blaming the different circumstances of present realities as being the cause of this shift. With the uncertainty of COVID that has been brought up time and time again in this study, the ability to recreate the circumstances of the past appear to have been lost. David shares this sentiment as he says, "I generally think we cannot have what we had before. We can have something similar or have something different. The new generation never experienced that so how would they be able to do it. So, I think we could only at most do something different, for better or for worse" (David: 2022). Here one can see a shared sentiment that what this DIY community had before the pandemic is impossible to get back. Both of them point to the fact that

the pandemic did not allow for the passing down of knowledge to younger generations, as they were not able to experience first-hand what the scene could be. However, what we see in David's account is a sense of optimism. While he realizes that the past cannot be recreated, he opens up the space for a new realization of DIY in a post-pandemic world.

It's undeniable that the repercussions of COVID will impact any and all social events for, at least, the near future. Both David and Alicia have alluded to this, especially how it has affected the next generation of youths and their social worlds. Recalling Alicia's discussion of how the community she found in the DIY scene impacted her life, she notes that this community was one of the first places she found a community of people with shared interests. Juxtaposing this to the ways that the pandemic has limited possibilities for youths to engage in person, I would not be the first to argue that social distancing has negatively impacted todays youth's ability to engage with each other socially. While I am not aiming to make definitive claims on COVID's impact on the social ability of youths, It is important to note that it has come up as a topic of discussion between my interlocutors and I. This came up specifically when David and I were discussing the younger faces we have seen at shows post-lock down, "I feel like being in high school during COVID and zoom class is such a damaging thing, and I could tell these people grew up in a different social circle than where a lot of kids now are at" (David: 2022). The people he is referring to are the older crowd of people in the scene who were either in college, post-grad, or at least out of high school before the pandemic. What David is pointing to here, is not that the younger generation of DIY is just different, as that is almost to be expected. Rather he is juxtaposing his experiences socializing in the scene as a young teen to how he sees the teens and young adults socializing today.

When discussing this phenomenon, Alicia calls attention to the ways social media has mediated DIY's presence, "I think that it was driven by the fact that social life was completely moved on line for a while, because then you only see a very curated portion of events. Going to shows and meeting the people who are playing is a completely different experience than seeing a video of them. There's less of that four-dimensional context in seeing how things happen in true time, and seeing how people interact with each other as well" (Alicia: 2022). As a result of this interaction with DIY's online archive of photos and videos, she notices what she calls an, "aesthetic uniformity without any of the substance behind it", similar to what was discussed around the image of the poseur (Alicia: 2022). However, this is not to be confused with the poseur, as they are not necessarily claiming the DIY scene to curate a reputation for themselves. Rather, due to their limited access to DIY communities and social scene's, they have built an understanding of what the scene is off of the content that was available to them. With their scope being limited to a curated selection of media representations, the "aesthetic uniformity" seems less jarring, as they are consuming the same media, the same memories, the same one-dimensional image of the pre-pandemic scene.

These discussions of the impact of COVID on the new generation of DIY youths, presents an argument for punk and DIY as being important spaces for pre-political cultural phenomena. This would push back on Barrett's arguments against "pre-political phenomenon" which are successful in achieving "…subjective aspects of politics, such as "personal identity, meaning and purpose"" (Barret 2013: 25). Barrett's criticism is important, however, the differences in the scene presented by my field work and my interlocutors show that punk and DIY spaces are crucial places for the cultivation of community and personal identity. When these spaces get shut down, or are no longer accessible to the greater community because of forces like

the pandemic, the community must look elsewhere to participate in this kind of community and identity building. Some turned to social media and online archives, and built an idea off a nostalgia they were not able to experience. Others, who had this four-dimensional nostalgia of the scene, turned more towards introspection and deeply personal investigations of identity and experiences. In this way, the pre-political phenomenon of the scene, moved from the venue, and manifested in a different mode in the minds of those forced to isolate during the various lock-downs and quarantines of our "new normal".

I remember early on in 2020, David and I often would speculate what will happen to live music when it came back. What would it sound like? Would it become more virtuosic, highly rehearsed? Or would it come back in a raging flurry of release from nationwide isolation and fear? Thinking back to these conversations, and juxtaposing them to what we have seen in live music's reemergence, our speculations were just that; speculations. In this city, any community, musical or otherwise, is constantly changing, adapting and becoming. The idea that we could have accurately predicted the sonic reverberations of isolation, seems almost absurd to me. What was made clear, as was stated earlier by David and Alicia, was that a return to what DIY used to be, is impossible. The most recent show I attended at Bohemian Grove drove that notion home for me. The venue, as familiar as it is to me, *felt* different. There was an atmosphere of uncertainty in the air; people would go back and forth I between wearing and not wearing masks, and confusingly enough, the room itself seemed more cramped than I remembered it being two years ago. Perhaps, this is the trauma of living through COVID which David identifies here, "I think COVID really traumatized a lot of us. I can't go to a concert without feeling just a tad bit nervous, just being around all those people. I think we all have to work around that trauma in some way or another. COVID is such a historical thing for music because it literally killed live

performances for so long" (David: 2022). Taking this perspective into account, it seems that the uncertainty and confusion I felt, is another side-effect of the pandemic.

These feelings have since manifested themselves into the music itself, as David's new band, Wince, has shown me in their performance. The overall timbre of the music I heard at their shows since presents the same fuzzy grit, however, it also portrays more feelings of solitude and longing than before. Isolated lyrics are framed on either side by heavy bass lines, and reverberating guitar which switches quickly between clean melodicism and heavily distorted dissonant riffs and wails. Coupled with the drummer going between periods of silence and build ups to rapid percussive swings and syncopation, the songs themselves feel uncertain of where they're going. Juxtaposed to how I remember David's last band pre-pandemic, the musical choices have made a noticeable shift. The music itself has gone from portraying a sense of collective experiences of living in urban settings, to touching on deeper and more personal feelings of existing in the world we find ourselves in today. David touches on this shift, explaining that,

> "Because of COVID having practice itself was scary. My songwriting process has been very isolating and alone. I was writing everything, and everything was super structured, because how can you improvise by yourself… I think COVID also affects everyone else's song writing, it's a lot more introspective, and I think playing live is different now… When you're playing in a band, and everyone is writing their own thing, it's very democratic and cohesive. Maybe not all of your personality comes out…but [now] everything is extremely personal and comes from me, and that's a scary thought to do. To be musically vulnerable in that way. But it's also super exciting because finally, I can really feel myself on stage" (David: 2022).

This look into how David views his, and others, songwriting has changed, points to larger theoretical arguments of being and becoming. In this example, the practices of writing and performing music remain constant. What changes is how, both physically and mentally, these practices manifest. Using this example of change within the scene, and bringing in theories of becoming from areas of queer and transgender studies, I will argue for a "transing" of DIY practices.

The aforementioned theoretical arguments can be pulled from the works of Judith Butler and Jay Prosser. In Butler's third chapter of Undoing Gender, she furthers the notions of Simon Beauvoir's theory of becoming a woman. Butler asserts that, "…becoming is the vehicle for gender itself" (Butler 2004: 65). Putting this in conversation with David's accounts of the differences between pre and post pandemic practices of writing and performing music, one can see that DIY musical practices are constantly in a state of change. To define what it means for a process of writing and performing music in a DIY context becomes highly mutable. In this way, the act of "doing" in the acronym "DIY" becomes the vehicle through which DIY manifests. Furthermore, because the "doing" itself is in a constant state of change, DIY as praxis cannot be neatly defined under one universal truth. Rather, it is embodied by each individual within the community through their engagements with performing and attending shows. Bringing in Prosser's work to further this argument, he asserts that, "…transition represents the movement in between that threatens to dislocate our ties to identity places we conceive of as essentially secure. Transition provokes discomfort…it pushes up against the very feasibility of identity. Yet it is also necessary for identity's continuity; it is that which moves us" (Prosser 1998: 3). Tying this in with how David describes his feelings of anxiety around being musically vulnerable on stage, one can see that it is through his own personal discomfort that he also begins to embody his true

identity on stage. Thus, the transition of the scene caused by the pandemic, pushed this community to re-evaluate their identities within the scene. While New York's DIY scene was never fully secure, as the threat of gentrification always loomed on the horizon, it's near complete disappearance during the height of COVID revealed just how unstable and uncertain it's future is. Its long-awaited return has displayed a somewhat forced shift in DIY, which for better or worse, speaks to Prosser's argument for transition's necessity in the continuity of identity. These theoretical and personal accounts of discomfort, transition, and identity show that DIY's possible futures are open ended. No one knows for sure what is going to happen in the coming years. The only thing we know for certain is that it will be different than what it was before. What DIY is today will look different tomorrow, and as it transitions day by day, it will continue to challenge us to rethink how we participate with our communities. Whatever happens in the future, DIY will persist, as the "doing" is also the "becoming" through which we find ourselves. As long as someone is out there willing to enact the "doing", there is a future for DIY.

Conclusion

Throughout this study of the New York DIY scene, I have been tremendously challenged to face the facts of reality. When I first embarked on this journey, I was hoping I would find that the scene I knew would be exactly the way was when I left it two years prior. However, that dream was crushed almost immediately. Even if there was no pandemic, this scene was bound to change. To think that this community would remain stagnant in a city which undergoes constant social, political, and economic shifts in the blink of an eye is, quite frankly, ignorant. As has been discussed extensively over the course of this study, gentrification and all of the side effects that come with it, has been a constant in the life of DIY music scenes. The introduction of the pandemic, as I have shown, just accelerated this process. Expanding on the definition of gentrification by bringing in the work of Sarah Schulman, I have argued that it is not just its physical manifestations which threaten the scene, but also its sociological manifestations in the phenomenon of the poseur.

In thinking about the venue, I have argued not only for the importance of the venue in the social life of DIY music communities, but also for the power DIY communities hold over the venues themselves. Through discussions of what a lack of stable venues has done to the community throughout the pandemic, it has been shown that the physical space alone is not what is crucial to the scene. Rather, it is what happens within these spaces that gives them the power they hold in the scene. Whether shows happen in a dirty basement, converted warehouse, or someone's roof, it is the presence of people who are there to engage with the music and each other that transform these places into a "DIY venue". By juxtaposing what my interlocuters and I see as "DIY spaces" to spaces we have noticed attempting to co-opt DIY aesthetics, this study also points to the cycles of capitalism which also threaten the scene. Pulling in historical

accounts of cultural capitalism, it is shown that what is happening in the New York DIY music scene runs parallel to what has happened in earlier manifestations of alternative and "indie" music. However, this is not to say that DIY is doomed to be subsumed by mainstream capitalism. Rather, this study goes further to theorize what possible futures are in store for New York's DIY community.

Trying to assume what the future looks like in any context is a daunting and nearly impossible task. For a moment, it seemed like there would be no future for this community. However, with DIY's rise from the proverbial ashes of COVID, this question of what it will look like going forward becomes complicated. While there are several accounts which paint the scene's current iterations as somewhat negative, such as the loss of accountability or substance in the community, these issues arise from sources outside of our control. It is not that the younger generation of DIY is attempting to co-opt the scene, but rather, the pandemic has barred them from experiencing similar formative experiences as the older generations. Such formative experiences have proven to hold extreme importance for individuals in the scene, both artistically and personally. Without the ability to have these first-hand experiences, how can one expect the scene to return to what it once was. That is where discussions of becoming and transformation re-enter this study, from theorizing the venue, to theorizing the entire DIY music scene as sights of continual becoming and transformation.

Through observations of manifestations of musical expression, as well as discussions with interlocutors close to the scene, themes of transformation come through as a connecting thread. As the pandemic pushed us all further away from each other, we had to adapt to the new reality of life. Thus, the ways that music was written, performed, and received in the scene adapted as well. By bringing in theoretical frameworks of trans identity, and applying them to

the experiences of individuals within the scene, this study argues for the importance of discomfort and transformation for the continuing creation of identity. By locating this in the "doing" of DIY, this action becomes the vehicle through which DIY can continue. Linking "doing" to actions of "becoming" places this action in the process of "transing" the scene. This "transing" does not imply gendered notions of embodiment, rather it elicits the actions which push DIY out of the boundaries of fixed definitions. Rather, DIY exists to push the boundaries of what it means to have and participate in musical community. This small three letter acronym carries with it the weight of a historical and political past, which continues to impact the social worlds of youths today. Because it cannot be concretely defined, it is up to this community to define it for themselves. Thus, the possibilities for the future of DIY are endless.

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