“I'm Gonna Gather Up All My Friends, And We're Gonna Sing These Songs Together”: Autoethnography, Individual Meanings, and Social Relationships in Punk Scenes

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Abstract

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This thesis examines the varying ways that individuals participate and identify with punk scenes. Based on autoethnographic methods of inquiry, the text forms its arguments through narrative dialogue and theoretical knowledge. Most often, studies on punk are situated in a subcultural framework. In this thesis, it is argued that 'scene theory' is a more favourable theoretical framework for studying punk. A selection of punk scenes are interpreted through the ways that individuals find meaning in their participation. Understanding punk scenes through individual perspectives presents an opportunity to understand the ways that participation in punk intersects with other facets of daily life. Punk scenes are understood as but one socio-cultural element within participants’ multifaceted lives. In this thesis, punk scenes are studied in terms of their overlaps, intersections, and influences on individual perceptions of self within social relationships.

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Introduction

Wednesday, June 13, 2012

I've been standing around at the back of L'Esco, a small basement bar frequently used as a venue for touring punk bands in Montreal's Plateau neighbourhood. It's a Wednesday night and I'm tired, it's not helping that I've had a little bit to drink. It has been a busy past few days. I arrived back in Montreal the day before after the nine-hour bus ride from Kitchener-Waterloo, Ontario. Tomorrow I'll be on a bus to Ottawa. My summer thus far has been a series of bus rides to and from Kitchener-Waterloo, and a few places in between, visiting family and friends as well as conducting my interviews for my thesis. I'll be meeting my brother Ben in Ottawa on Thursday for the Ottawa Explosion Weekend to see some bands and do a few more interviews. It's the tail end of my interview process and it's been an exciting and terrifying experience so far. I'm motivated, overjoyed, and impassioned by the responses of my interview subjects, and the perspectives, stories, and opportunities they have provided.

This June evening is cooling down but the body heat in the small and crowded basement doesn't help to alleviate the humidity. I keep myself busy, staring at my phone, half-listening to the first few bands playing. I know I'd be better off sleeping right now but I can't miss out on seeing the last band. This is the first of three nights in a row that I plan to see Iron Chic from Long Island, New York, a band that has - to my knowledge - not yet travelled across the border to play in Canada. Local bands Prevenge and Dig It Up open the show, playing to

a familiar crowd. The bands converse with people in the crowd. There is a sense of familiarity and camaraderie with the people singing along to their songs. In between these bands I grab a drink and sit on a bench in the back cobblestone walkway leading to the terrace where the crowd meanders in between sets for a drink and cigarette.

After waiting through the first two bands I make it to the front of the small basement bar for Low Culture, a band that I briefly checked out on the Internet during the day. The crowd is sparse compared to the attention the first two bands drew. But the band's sound was pleasantly surprising, a power chord driven pop punk sound reminiscent of the Ramones. It was even more surprising to hear from an interviewee a few days later that Low Culture jumped on a plane from New Mexico at the offer to play at the Ottawa Explosion Weekend. There were no questions of payment until they finally arrived (Sayer and Martin 2012). They finish their set and I stand around at the front of the stage - it's not exactly a stage, rather a two or three inch raised floor at the front corner of the bar with barely enough room for guitar cabs and amps, monitors, microphones, and a drum kit. In behind the band and drum kit is an exposed brick wall ledge and half-windows that allows the front terrace onlookers to bend forward in their chairs, cup their hands around their eyes, and try to gaze through the streaky windows.

As Iron Chic now sets up, tuning guitars, checking amp levels and setting up the drum kit, the crowd makes its way back to the stage. I am beginning to feel cramped and squeezed on all sides as others try to claim their space as close to the band as possible. The band starts and bodies begin to sway. People are raising

their arms, singing along, dancing, and crowd surfing. I move along to the music, I shout the lyrics to the songs, I get pushed around by others trying to squeeze themselves up close to the microphone stands and band. It's a kind of chaos - a partially controlled mania of bodies. Iron Chic ends with "Time Keeps On Slipping Into The (Cosmic) Future." The lyrics of the song seem to reflect feelings of uncertainty and purposelessness – themes that often reoccur in the punk music that I listen to. The singer gruffly sings with his eyes closed, "The cycle goes on and on/ an endless circle of scaring the shit out of me." He runs through a chorus, and into the second verse, "Just trying to find our place/ fight our way through a four dimensional space/ and our reward for this/ is not knowing why we exist." The song's snare-drum driven beat halts at the bridge, a steady bass-line keeps rhythm while the crowd joins in with the band to quietly hum "whoa oh" over and over. The singer is rocking back and forth, stumbling around the small space, trapped in between mic stands, his band mates, and the drum kit behind him. As he stumbles it is difficult to tell whether he is drunk or has let the swell of the music consume him. He softly sings,

> If I can ask one thing when I am dead
> would you lay me down by the river bed?
> Let me wash away
> let it take me back from where I came.
> All I am and all I was is just
> blood and dirt and bones and mud
> and I'm better off that way,
> I'm better off that way (Iron Chic, 2010).

Some of the crowd joins in with the singer while others harmonize the lyrics with the "woah ohs" that overlay the singing on the record. The front of the stage is beginning to feel even more cramped as people push closer and closer towards the

front in anticipation of the song building back up. The subdued guitar picking crescendos to the full ring of a power chord, the snare drum pounds a steady beat again, and the rest of the band joins in to repeat the lyrics one last time. Everyone hugs around the singer on the small stage and the crowd consumes him. Our voices are heard in unison over the guitars and drums. The last chord of the song is struck and the moment begins to deflate. While it seems that this was Iron Chic's intended finale of the night, hand clapping, cheering, and voices in the crowd convince the band to play one more song. Yet the intensity and power of "Time Keeps On Slipping…" is not quite achieved.

Once the last song is finished the members of the band take off their guitars and leave the stage. Some of the band members head for the bar while others head outside for some fresh air and a cigarette. I pull out my earplugs and the sounds of the bar return to full volume along with a faint ringing in my ears. I'm not one for sticking around after things have dissipated at a show; I walk up the few steps out the bar, squeeze through the crowded terrace and the over pour of people on the sidewalk of St. Denis. I'll probably make it just in time for the last metro if I walk fast enough.

Christine Lortie Photos. “Prevenge | Dig it Up | Low Culture | Iron Chic.” 2012 (Bottom left corer foreground, glasses, and mouth wide open is me, Iron Chic on stage.)

Introducing, Outlining, Complicating

It’s the one stand I will always take, because in the dancing exists the little unshakable nugget of hope and self-evident truth that makes me barrel out of the show drenched in sweat and want to change the world, want to write books, want to play music that connects to some lonely 15 year old and save them the way I was saved, want to rip apart racism, and sexism, and homophobia, and all these shitty destructive prejudices, want to shock oppressive arseholes with wild situationist pranks, and blow minds with truth, and burn down entrenched class systems with a song in my heart and a glint in my eye (Briggs 2011).

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During the months of April, May, and June of 2012 I spoke with thirteen people who shared their opinions, stories, and experiences of punk. This thesis is an examination and telling of their stories. This examination will consider how the use of personal narrative and autoethnography can contribute to the body of literature focused on punk and the concept of 'scene(s)'. A strong emphasis is placed on the complexity of music, ideologies, and attitudes that are negotiated in daily life and characterized by individuals' experiences. Using personal narrative as a form of inquiry allows for research "centered on the question of how human experience is endowed with meaning and on the moral and ethical choices we face as human beings who live in an uncertain and changing world" (Ellis and Bochner 2003, 217). I am interested in understanding the meanings that are taken away from punk in the everyday life of its participants - in the varying circumstances that they encounter, engage with, and experience it. The main research questions are: What do personal experiences reveal about the way that punk is understood by its participants? What meanings does punk have according to participants and in what ways do participants relate these meanings to their daily life? Does autoethnography allow for a more nuanced approach to the study of scenes and punk? These questions will be explored through conversations with participants who identify with punk, through my own personal reflections, and through past academic work related to the study of punk, music culture, and autoethnographic methodologies.

My literature review begins with Dick Hebdige's (1979) *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. His book is a significant contribution to the cultural studies conception of subculture, and for its application to the late seventies era punk in the UK. Following Hebdige, I will outline some of the major divergences and reorientations (LeBlanc 1999, Muggleton 2000) of the term subculture and its applications to punk. I will also focus on several recent texts that have looked at punk within other socio-cultural models (Baulch 2007, O'Connor 2002). Lauraine LeBlanc's (1999) investigation of girls' experiences of punk makes a distinction that is important to my thesis. She is critical of how punk is historically documented in academic work. She argues that privileging the voices of 'major figures' and detailing specific localized histories "neglect the punks themselves, the kids who are responsible for the enactment and continuance of particular cultural manifestations that make up punk. Few punk kids – and much less punk girls – would recognize themselves within these academic-jargon-laden interpretations of punk, or even in the more concrete histories" (34). LeBlanc argues for a more experiential focus on punk's participants, rather than a catalogue of bands, people, styles, and sounds. In this thesis I will emphasize the intricacies of meaning that individuals derive from their understandings, definitions, and experiences of punk. Instead of using the concept of subculture, I will argue for the use of Straw's (1991) conception of 'scene' as a more useful framework.

My theory chapter presents Straw's conception of the word 'scene' as a more useful conceptual model for thinking about punk. This is for two reasons.

Through my own personal experience, as well as through my interview process, it is apparent that the word 'scene' is used more often than subculture as a descriptor for punk. Secondly, Straw's (2002) conception of scene is a more loosely bound concept that characterizes cultural frameworks through social connection, porous boundaries, and non-essentializing affiliation (248). These characteristics qualify the way that I've come to understand punk through my own personal experiences and research process. The punk scene(s) that I examine are plural, disconnected, and osmotic in their transmission of ideas, music, attitudes and perspectives. I use Straw's concept of scene in conjunction with the work of DeNora (1986, 1995, 2006), especially her book Music in Everyday Life (2000). DeNora develops a theoretical approach in her book based on the assertion that "music is in dynamic relation with social life" (20). DeNora argues for research that understands musical meaning as inextricably bound to the interpreter (30). I will use a combination of Straw and DeNora's work as an attempt to understand scenes, a term of cultural analysis, from the individual and subjective level on which a scene is understood and interpreted. The juxtaposition of the contributions of these two thinkers will help to provide insight into the ways that individuals interpret the social structures and formations of punk scenes, and how their participation in the social formation of such scenes influence their sense of identity and their everyday life.

My methodology will present an overview and argument for the application of autoethnographic research practices for the study of punk. Ellis (2004) describes autoethnography generally as "writing about the personal and its

relationship to culture. It is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness" (37). I believe that it is important to stress my voice as the one who is constructing this text and curating multiple voices into a coherent narrative. The interview content of this thesis provides multiple perspectives, understandings, and unique stories of punk. The acknowledgement of subjectivity, fragmented perspective, multiplicity of voices, and social relationships are essential to understanding punk as a complicated set of disharmonious practices and ideas. An autoethnographic approach takes these peoples' stories as evidence of the significance of punk in the ways that it intersects other facets of a participant's sense of identity and social life.

Reading Guide

Thus far I have identified my literature review, theory, and method chapters, as well as the arguments that will be present. An autoethnographic method must consider the textual presentation of these chapters. Ellis (2004) describes autoethnography as

> usually written in first person-voice, autoethnographic texts appear in a variety of forms – short stories, poetry, fiction, novels, photographic essays, scripts, personal essays, journals, fragmented and layered writing, and social science prose. They showcase concrete action, dialogue, emotion, embodiment, spirituality, and self-consciousness. These features appear as relational and institutional stories affected by history and social structure, which themselves are dialectically revealed through actions, feelings, thoughts, and language. (38).

This thesis will employ an interwoven method of conversation and argument. Interview content will be presented as conversational interludes that will preempt chapters and sections. This method will culminate in a discussion chapter that will

embody the autoethnographic argument for narrative, concrete action, multiple voices, and fragmentation. The content of these sections will highlight the participants' understandings of punk that compliment the arguments of the chapters. These sections are derived from transcripts of my interviews that are then realized through a narrative method of description, action, and dialogue. At times the language of the participants is messy and grammatically incorrect. As participants stumble over words, pause, and interject their subjective voice and personality are textually represented.[1] These sections will reveal the unique perspectives of participants, and enrich the arguments of my literature review, theory, and method chapters.

[1] I have italicized the sections that are straightforward transcriptions of my interviews, and in two cases where a participant wrote the text. The longer dialogues that include my interpretations and descriptions are written as narrative dialogue; interview transcriptions and my journal notes are the basis of these dialogues.

Literature Review

Duff Black

"Marx is like all I read anymore. It's ridiculous," Duff laughed off.[2] We were sitting outside on a bench in uptown Waterloo just around the corner from the public square that was the *de facto* meeting spot for most of my interviews. Duff and I met twice in one week. Our first meeting was stopped short when the memory card for the audio recorder had reached its capacity – something I should have attended to prior to the interview. But this unexpected break in our conversation gave me some time to reflect. Duff was using familiar language that has been introduced, over and over again, in my university career, but it sounded unfamiliar in the context of our conversations on punk. Words like 'meritocracy', 'anti-capitalism', and 'anti-oppressive' coloured the vocabulary he used to describe punk. By the time he was doing his undergrad at Wilfrid Laurier University, Karl Marx and socialism were familiar to him through the lyrics of punk bands he was listening too. This was a sudden change from some of my previous interviews, something that I looked forward to delving into with Duff on our second day of conversations.

Strong winds were being picked up on the audio recorder. I distractedly checked the sound levels often to ensure that our voices were not muffled by the loud gusts, rustling leaves, and nearby traffic. I asked Duff to explain some of the connections he had made between his undergrad education and his personal

[2] Dialogue is derived from: Black, Jeff "Duff". Interview by author. Audio recording. Waterloo, Ontario. June 7, 2012.

interest in punk. After laughing off his quip about reading Marx he continued, “I think I was talking the other day about Adorno and Horkheimer and the culture industry. And reading that made me sorta question this idea about punk rock and sorta think that maybe what your prof wrote on your paper was true. But at the same time it just forced me to look at things in a different context.”

I had told Duff about an experience I had in my undergrad. In my third and fourth year of my Communication Studies and English BA at Wilfrid Laurier, I was increasingly interested in making connections between personal experiences with punk and the readings that were being introduced in my classes. The paper Duff referenced was for a course, broadly, titled “Digital Communication.” The Internet was the main concern of this course featuring readings on its historical context and the social, cultural, and political implications of its ubiquitous use. The topic of my paper was on punk subculture and the affordances of the Internet to provide tools for mass communication and dissemination at low cost. This was a positive point that I was trying to make: these affordances granted the ability of an underground and independent punk to disseminate music and ideas without the reliance on corporate music production and industry. I used the examples of MySpace, blog interfaces, and forums. The mark on the paper was good but his comments were disheartening.

I paraphrased to Duff, “He made this comment about how, you know, ‘this is how capitalism maintains itself, by leeching off of these subcultures and the subculture is allowed to maintain their anti-capitalist identity.’”

Duff and I both knew that in a sense he was right. Cynical. But right. This

was how I had viewed most literature in my undergrad that dealt with cultural production. I told Duff, “I've read the Adorno stuff on his classification on high-low culture and classical music. I remember doing that and reading that in a class. And, I mean, I'm dismissive of it. I mean I know that maybe I'm naively dismissive of it, or I just don't want to acknowledge it exists, or that’s what informs certain attitudes of production culture.”

Duff explained a different context to consider punk within, “Well I think guys like that, the critical theory school were writing -,” he cut himself off and begins a new direction of thought, “Okay, I'm going to reference this author that I'm pretty obsessed with. Zigmund Bauman writes about this idea that we're living in liquid modernity. Like all the solid institutions of the modern era are just melting away, and we're just sort of floating. And I think that Adorno and Horkheimer and those people were writing about the culture industry and various things during a time when all of that seemed very established and solid. And it's not really like that anymore and so things have a bit more give. So, punk rock doesn't necessarily fall into their classification. And I read - I can't remember what I read it in, but I read someone say that punk rock represented, sorta, the obfuscation of lines between high and low culture because it was obviously made by very intellectual people. I mean, minus the Ramones who I think were actually pretty stupid people. But in general, the early punk scene was some very clever people who are playing music that was deceptively simply. And in that sense those distinctions between what high and low art are are blurred.”

As Duff explained the high-low culture break in punk, my mind jumped to

the central text of my undergrad that has informed my critical interpretations, “Do you think though that we read into that? Into the initial first wave too much? It’s always hard to tell and like - I don't know. Have you read Dick Hebdige's book, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*?”

“No I haven't. I've heard of it.”

“He sort of does the same where he reads into the style of dance and dress, and then places this whole - like the whole book is just listing a whole bunch of signifiers that he sees within the culture, you know?” I tried to hastily explain Hebdige to Duff, “And I question - he has been academically questioned - how much has he emphasized his own interpretation of things?”

“Yeah, I get that. But all I have to go on obviously is interviews in which a lot of people from that era, and also the American hardcore scene in the early eighties, seemed very well read and very conscious to what they're doing. Well not all of them, but for the most part they're conscious that punk rock is an inherently political subculture. And I tend to infer from that that a lot of those people - like I think Patti Smith was a pretty clever person and, you know, David Byrne and the rest of the people in Talking Heads. I think they were aware of what they were doing. But at the same time you're right that probably a lot of that is me sort of…” Duff pauses for a moment. “I'm the signified in that sign, I'm pushing my own -.”

“No, sorry, I didn't mean to question it,” I interrupted. In hindsight I imposed this point of view upon Duff to consider, yet he was correct to acknowledge that what we can know about past punk is only through what is

discernable from past interviews, histories, and music. I explained my perspective on the way punk can be situated by authors like Hebdige, “I think that that's one of my hang-ups with this whole thing, or with my whole project, is that I've read all these histories of punk and it's just one single author that tells you, ‘this is how it was.’ And I don't want to write that. I don't want to write about contemporary punk and say, ‘this is how it is.’ *I want people to tell me how it is for them*.”

“It’s like a grassroots project,” Duff said as I continued my explanation.

“I know it's, like, such a subtle word choice but I think it makes all the difference about talking about this -.”

“Yeah, definitely.”

“ - That it can't be talked about and summed up by one particular perspective or historical account. It has to be accounted for by the personal investment in the stories that people have to tell about it for themselves.”

“I agree,” Duff responded. He then assessed his understanding of how he has experienced punk, “And I think that the individual meanings, and I pluralize that on purpose, that we all associate with punk rock are kinda what makes it such an interesting and cool thing to participate in. Like all of my friends in the scene around here have their own ideas of what we're doing when we go to shows and I don't think there's really any sense that, you know, they think I'm wrong or I think they’re wrong. It's just a space for mutual respect of those different ideas. And sort of what makes it vibrant, even in like a pretty provincial town like this one - the scene is vibrant because of that mutual respect and because we're all allowed to express our feelings on it without feeling like we're going to be questioned or

excluded…"

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My conversation with Duff continued on like this for some time. There were at least two points in the interview where I told Duff that we had completed all the questions I wished to ask, but we continued to trail off into new directions. Whether it was Duff and I talking more personally about some of our favourite bands from the area, or Duff clarifying earlier statements that he had made. He had put a lot of thought into his commitment and identification with punk; he often asked to make clarifications and addendums to his previous statements. This made it clear that the questions I asked him (about his identification with punk, his understanding of it, and the associated meanings he took from it) were ones that he had considered long before I brought them up.

Where Duff found interest in political theorists that informed his understanding of punk, I sought the academics that chose punk as their subject matter and the corresponding theoretical frameworks. I took interest in reading how these academics chose to write about punk and looked for reflections of my experiences within these readings. The following literature review will spring from my first encounter with punk in an academic context – *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (Hebdige 1979). This is a history of punk through an academic lens, and through this lens I will focus on how it has been accounted for in the past and in what ways it has been described. Past accounts of punk will be considered in how it is conceptualized and to what academic traditions and concepts it is usually situated within. This literature review is interested in the

following questions: How does Dick Hebdige describe punk as subculture? How do others following Hebdige describe punk as subculture? How is punk described within other theoretical frameworks? This chapter ends with how I will interpret punk.

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Andrew: So why don't you tell me how you sorta started going to shows when you were a kid. Like how did that all sort of start out for you? What sorta motivated to doing that kind of stuff?

Justin: Some of the first shows I went to was when I was fourteen. And I'm pretty sure the very first show I ever went to was an Iron Bitchface show at the Registry with my friend Kaleigh. And I don't remember why I went with her, other than that I thought she was cool. I just wanted to go to a show with her. And then I went to a couple other ones. I remember seeing The Charge. I met Mckayla there, who I am still friends with. I don't remember why I first started going, other than it just seemed like the cool thing to do with my Saturday night (Easterbrook 2012).

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Andrew: Uh, so, I don't know, why don't you tell me - like how - like what got you involved in starting with going to shows or, like, playing in punk bands, and stuff.

Andy: I played in a band, you know, in high school and was like, 'Oh, how am I going to play more shows, how am I going to meet more people,' and I just went out and started going to more punk shows and meeting more people there (Clark

2012).

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Dick Hebdige, Punk, and Subculture

As I crudely described to Duff, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* documents and analyzes the emergence of punk in the United Kingdom during the seventies. Writing from a cultural studies perspective, Hebdige constructs a linear history of post-World War II British subcultures leading to the most recent, punk. Considered within the "gloomy, apocalyptic ambience of the late 1970s," punks are read "as signs of the highly publicized decay which perfectly represented the atrophied condition of Great Britain" (Hebdige 1979, 87).

Punk's take on fashion, music, and attitude was defiantly antithetical to mainstream culture. It was loud, shocking, and abrasive. Hebdige likens died hair, makeshift clothing, crass behaviour, and, as Duff explained, deceptively simple music to the bricolage and juxtaposition of Surrealist and Dadaist art that "disrupts and reorganizes meaning" (106). This is understood through the language of semiotics. Hebdige is able to provide a detailed account of punk by reading the "glossy surfaces of style" (18). The surfaces of style are understood as signifiers that are displaced from their original context (the domestic safety pin is often referred to by Hebdige) to signify a disruptive subcultural meaning.

Hebdige's take on punk is a benchmark for cultural studies work on subculture and punk. But it has met a few challenges and revisions since its initial 1979 publishing. The most surprising aspect of the book is the tense in which Hebdige writes about punk. Punk, as a subculture, had emerged and quickly faded

out in only a few short years; it is written about in past tense for Hebdige. Punk's ability to disrupt the dominant systems of meaning with its style became less potent as the dominant culture redressed the symbolic deviance within an understood system of meaning. Through a process of recuperation, the disruptive signs of punk subculture are turned into mass produced commodities, and the defiant attitude is tamed as youthful rebellion (94). It is this historical specificity and totalizing theoretical framework that punk, as subculture, becomes problematic.

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Andrew: Why did you start going to punk shows when you were a kid?

Dave: Um, well, when I was like probably ten or eleven years old, uh, I didn't really have many hobbies because I wasn't into sports and stuff like that. So, my parents decided to give me guitar lessons. So, I started learning guitar and drums, and started playing music and stuff. And, like the first music I was really exposed to outside of, you know, the stuff that everybody learns when they first start playing music – like ACDC and Led Zepplin and stuff – was punk bands like Green Day, and Blink 182, and Sum 41 and stuff like that. So I started listening to more and more of that. And then I decided that I'd join a band and when I joined a band the guy who played lead guitar and sang in the band showed me 'fiveonenine'[website for local punk] (Emrich, 2012).

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Subculture and Punk Re-Worked

Derived from interviews and personal experience of mid-nineties North American punk, LeBlanc (1999) addresses some of the problems with a subcultural approach to studying punk, as well as gaps in the way that punk is often documented. LeBlanc finds concern with the way punk, as subculture, is often placed within theories of structuralism and semiotics where totalizing systems of meaning, that are understood by the researcher, can render participants unable to articulate their understanding of the resistive style they have chosen to adopt (15). LeBlanc argues for an ethnographic approach to studying punk, allowing participants to express how they have come to understand their identification and participation in the subculture. She also understands punk's resistance as a political "rebellion against authority" (34) as opposed to the subcultural approach where resistance is symbolically represented as style.

Documenting punk is another of LeBlanc's concerns. She notes that punk is often documented through biographies of bands and major figures (33). This is the kind of history that finds its way into larger narratives of popular music history, an account of style, notable figures, and other important facts and dates. LeBlanc is concerned with understanding punk through its participants that continue to indentify and live-out their rebellion against authority. By conducting interviews and participant observation, LeBlanc is able to construct a compelling text with fascinating dialogue, voice, and perspective of young girls and women in punk.

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Andrew: So where I've been starting off is getting people to give me a little background about themselves, like, where, or when, was it that you started hanging out at punk shows, or what was it that got you into punk music, or participating in a punk scene, or whatever you would like to call it.

Bobbie: So, when I was about fourteen or fifteen I think I just kinda got word of, you know, some shitty local band playing at some shitty bar in Guelph or something. And I went. And I enjoyed it. I enjoyed the atmosphere. I enjoyed the bands. Looking back now they were probably terrible. But, when you are fourteen or fifteen and you're like looking for something to latch on to and something to be a part of, uh, that, like, really captured me because every one was super friendly and everyone was kinda into the same things, and it was all very inclusive and I guess, kinda, easy going (Tubbs 2012).

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David Muggleton, Punk, and Subculture

In an explicit redress of subcultural theory and punk, David Muggleton's (2000) *Inside Subculture: The Postmodern Meaning of Style* considers punks (and other subcultures: goths, hippies, skinheads) through a postmodern worldview where subculture is unfixed from historical specificity, and subjective meaning is privileged. Through interviews with participants whom identify as punk, mod, and skinhead, Muggleton formulates a thesis revolving around the issues that LeBlanc briefly addresses in her text.

Muggleton's approach to addressing punk, and other subcultures, makes

an important distinction from previous work. Hebdige was fortunate enough to be present at a landmark period for punk, its inception and initial introductions into popular culture. Punk unfolded in front of his eyes, so to speak, and he was able to witness the early commodificaton of its style and the mass media representations that he regards as the processes of subcultural recuperation. Subcultural style precedes the 'post-subculturalist's' (as opposed to a 'subculturalist') social and cultural context: "the post-subculturalist will experience all the signs of the subculture of their choosing time and time again through the media before inscribing these signifiers on their own bodies. Choosing is the operative word here, for post-subculturalists revel in the availability of subcultural choice" (47). Muggleton makes it clear that those who identify with punk style following punk's emergent period are in a position where it has been defined and represented to them through popular culture; socioeconomic and political context are no longer the key frames for a subculture to emerge from. Instead, donning punk style is simply a matter of choice.

Uprooting punk and subculture from historical context displaces the central thesis of Hebdige's work: style as resistance to dominant symbolic meaning. Muggleton's notion of punk is still rooted in the same markers of punk style that Hebdige referred to. But within Muggleton's understanding of subcultural style, as choice, the resistive symbolism of punk style is disconnected from the historical, political, and socioeconomic conditions of 1970s Britain that contextualized it against dominant discourse. Punk style, situated in new historical conditions, becomes simulacra (47). Style as resistance is understood through

individual identification: “this is a liminal sensibility that manifests itself as an expression of freedom from structure, control and restraint, ensuring that stasis is rejected in favour of movement and fluidity” (158). The contained conditions of punk subculture in opposition to a dominant culture that Hebdige identified are no longer necessary for punk style to retain a sense of resistive meaning. Muggleton and Weinzrl (2003) regard punk style in more fluid systems of social organization where identity traverses across many “hybrid cultural constellations” (3). Punk style can be ‘put on’ and ‘taken off’ by individuals because the social and cultural contexts that they find themselves within are now understood to be overlapping, fragmented, and pluralized.

Muggleton and LeBlanc solve some of the initial problems with subculture theory and punk that I had explained to Duff. Concerned with how punk is documented, LeBlanc argues for an ethnographic study of individuals who identify as punk and reworks a definition of resistance to be political rather than merely stylistic. Muggleton unbinds punk from the historical specificity of 1970s Britain, and addresses the individuality of punk identification and the multiplicity of social contexts that it may find itself embedded within. But there are still some concerns that both these texts do not address when dealing with punk as subculture.

If Muggleton and LeBlanc solve some answers in the way that Hebdige’s subcultural look at punk may be difficult to reconcile, they both leave some unanswered concerns. The surface level of style continues to be Muggleton’s concern, even if he does regard the subjective points of view that LeBlanc

previously pointed out to be missing from early accounts of punk as subculture. His decision to regard punk style as "merely a stylistic game to be played" (2000, 47) trivializes how individuals find meaning in their choice to adopt punk style. Reworking subcultural theory in postmodern conditions of fragmentation, plurality, and multiple meanings are most certainly important developments to understanding punk but continuing to adopt subcultural study for the purpose of understanding style falls short of digging below stylish surfaces.

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Andrew: So, why don't you then, um, tell me a little bit about how you started getting into punk. And, so, I guess you said grew up in Guelph, like did it start there? And how does it all work, or how did it all begin for you?

Matthew: I just reconnected with an old friend from, like, grade one and grade two who was on the brisk of discovering punk rock too. I guess it was mostly through ska and, like, radio friendly bands because that was shortly after Goldfinger and Reel Big Fish, kinda, had their commercial success, and No Doubt. Before you even knew what punk was you still heard them on the radio and you kind of explored (O'Connor 2012).

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Andrew: So, the first thing I've been asking people is for them to explain to me a little bit about how it is, or why it is, they got interested in punk. And what did that entail, was it listening to music, or starting to go to shows, or getting yourself involved, and where did it all started for you?

Celeigh: I guess, you know, I was fourteen, I was angst-y, but most of all I was upset at the fact that life had controlled me and taken me completely out of my country, away from my friends and family. And I couldn't do anything about it. And I really, really went out to punk music and its expression, its emotion. And there was no holding back from anything, it was really free flowing and that really spoke to angry fourteen-year-old Celeigh. It really, really spoke to me [Laughs]. I loved it (Barber-Russell 2012).

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Beyond Subculture, Yet Still Problematic

Hebdige regarded 1970s British punk as the birth and death of punk subculture, and Muggleton's account of subcultural theory remains tied to the style of 1970s British punk. Muggleton's interest in punk and subculture, as the topic of his project, stemmed from a perspective that I find myself trying to correct as well. Having grown up in the 1970s, in Britain, he cannot identify with the accounts of punk that have defined the experiences that he lived (2000, 166). But many accounts of punk in academic literature, armed with new theoretical frameworks such as Muggleton's reworked subculture theory, still regard punk as a historical moment in time.

I find myself stuck in the same situation as Muggleton where most literature that I read does not speak to my, or my participants', experiences of punk. A great deal of literature on punk seems to be caught in a historicized, and often, fondly lamented period of rebellion and productivity that inexplicably

washes away by the late 1980s. It is as if punk fell off the face of the earth to never again be discussed without regarding more recent iterations as cheap imitation of its potent birth. The participants that I interviewed were born in the 1980s and 1990s. The 1970s and 1980s era of punk is anachronistic, for most, as a point of personal origin, an antiquated notion of punk that has ignored the ways in which it has been pluralized, appropriated, and redefined.

An interesting case and point of this argument is apparent in a recently founded journal. The inaugural volume of *Punk & Post-Punk* was issued in September of 2011. I was conflicted reading the editorial. There is promise for exploring such issues as punk's intersection with other forms of expressions: "Radical ideas rooted in music often blossom and find forceful expression across media; indeed, the journal strives to explore the ways punk and post-punk are present and represented in film and television, literature, journalism, theatre, fine art, dance, stand-up comedy, fashion, graphic design and new media" (Kisley and Ogg 2011, 3). Yet the language is not quite how I imagine it should be; punk should be imagined in overlaps and intersections with these other forms of expression and media. Yet this slight shift in perspective is not possible because of the way that the editors have bound the terms 'punk' and 'post-punk' as historicized moments. Similar to Hebdige, the editors write about punk in past tense: "[*Punk & Post-Punk*] will explore notions of the 'alternative' and the 'independent' during the heady days of the punk explosion and the ensuing post-punk era" (ibid). Punk and Post-Punk ends in the 1980s for this journal, therefore discussions of current bands or music trends in this journal relate punk as a

historicized moment with recognizable conditions that can be applied elsewhere.

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Andrew: Maybe, do you want to tell me a little bit about what it was, or when was it, that started getting you interested in punk when you were a kid.

Kyle: It started more so with the Internet, than anything. I remember when I was, like, ten I got Napster with my dad. And I was looking for, basically, songs from the Tony Hawk video games on Napster. And I think I was looking for a Goldfinger song, because 'Superman' was on one - Tony Hawk One. And I got their cover of 99 Red Balloons, which accidently lead me to the7 Seconds version of 99 Red Balloons in the good ol' Napster days where you just put in 99 Red Balloons and everyone who's ever done it pops up. And then from there I just started listening to that more, and then when I went to high school I was just kinda brushing the edge of punk (Krische 2012).

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Positive Punk Perspectives

I have begun on a negative tone that I wish to overcome. I must acknowledge that Hebdige is writing about the specific conditions, time, and place of punk in the 1970s. He is also writing within the larger project of cultural studies at the time. Another major work on youth subculture and resistance comes from Hall et al. (1975). Yet, what I do think is worthy of consideration is that Hebdige's work - apart from it's contribution to CCCS cultural studies - is acknowledged in many recent works that look at punk. His work should be

considered within its contribution to literature on punk. I have therefore considered how his notion of subculture, within other works about punk, has been appropriated and used.

Hebdige is aware of his argument's shortcomings. He regards his study to fall into the trap of romanticizing (1979, 138). He concludes, in Barthes' words, on the shortcomings of a Barthes-guided semiotic analysis,

> The study of subcultural style which seemed at the outset to draw us back towards the real world, to reunite us with 'the people,' ends by merely confirming the distance between the reader and the 'text', between everyday life and 'mythologist' whom surrounds, fascinates and finally excludes. It would seem that we are still, like Barthes (1972) 'condemned for some time yet to speak excessively about reality' (140).

Nonetheless, Hebdige has provided an intriguing and insightful account of 1970s era British punk, and provides a theory in which others have built upon. Other recent works that have looked at punk also provide insight despite some theoretical missteps.

In a case study of four punk scenes (Washington D.C., Toronto, Ontario, Austin Texas, and Mexico City, Mexico) in the late 1970s, and into the early 1980s, O'Connor (2002) argues that postmodern characterizations of hybrid culture and "disembodied" flows of ideas and media are inadequate to describe the ways that punk travels (226). An ethnographic method is O'Connor's solution where the "conduits through which musical culture flow are not random but have a social organisation. This is often difficult to document but this does not mean that the only alternative is chaos theory" (232). The four case studies are to be the exemplar of his argument. O'Connor meticulously shapes the conditions of each punk scene: the bands, the people, and the venues.

Moore (2004) examines 1970s British punk and 1980s American hardcore punk as two different responses to the conditions of post-modernity. British punk is qualified as a "culture of deconstruction" (308) that uproots dominant systems of meaning to shock and awe, and American hardcore punk is qualified as a "culture of authenticity" (308). Moore investigates the Do-It-Yourself (DIY) ethic that emerged in American punk. This proves useful as he describes punk as more than merely style, and outlines the ways in which DIY ethics "transformed media and consumer identities into independent networks of cultural production, which enabled a sense of local community, allowed spectators to become participants, and created a space for public debate and dissent" (323). Although Moore investigates punk in the past he provides useful understandings of punk that move beyond surface notions of style. He explains punk in a way that is reflective of the experiences that my participants described; the term DIY was a common descriptor of participants' interpretations of punk.

Baulch's (2007) examination of the punk, metal, and reggae scenes in 1990s Bali provides a thorough case study in the vein of O'Connor's argument for detailed ethnography that understands the social organization of the flows of music culture. Baulch situates her study within the conditions of globalization, citing familiar postmodern adjectives such as fragmentation, hybridization, and diversity (6). She argues that, unlike North American and British punk, Bali has no early punk precedents. Therefore an examination of the global flow of media is necessary to understand how, and when, punk, metal, and reaggae music came to Bali (ibid). Subsequently, she provides an analysis of these scenes under the

specific social, cultural, and political conditions of Balinese society. Baulch offers an alternative to the notion of resistance that is commonly associated with punk. Hebdige describes resistance to a dominant symbolic meaning, and LeBlanc reorients resistance as political rebellion against authority, Baulch would rather consider scenes in terms of "liminality and in-between-ness which enables revisions of the mundane orientating dualisms inherent to dominant discourses of identity. Such revisions are best accommodated by heterotopic, ambivalent spatialities, experiences of communality that can enable reflexive modes" (182). This understanding of scenes to be liminal spaces is important when considering the hybrid cultural constellations which punk intersects and overlaps for an individual.

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Andrew: How did you get into punk, as a kid?

Duff: I guess when I was really young in elementary school I was, sorta, vaguely interested in punk bands, but not in a way that I knew what I was listening to, if you know what I mean. I was into Green Day, I guess, when I was in elementary school. I like Green Day a lot. But, at the time I didn't think of music as being -. I didn't know what genres were and I didn't think of it as being an identifier in any sense. I guess, I actually got into - sorta, consciously in grade eight, I would say (Black 2012).

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Andrew: I'm interested to hear what got you into punk.

Tyler: …And so for me it was just like I bought these Rancid records and the Clash, and then I realized, 'Oh this music cool.' And then realized there's people in our town doing similar stuff. And so then you just start going to shows because it was cheap and it was something to do instead of going to movies (Robertson 2012).

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Conclusions

I have described punk's beginnings, academically. Beginning with Hebdige who describes punk as subculture, and the subsequent literature that has expanded the study of punk into other theoretical frameworks. What has been made apparent is the problem of a historically specific moment in time that has been regarded as punk, as well as the inadequacy of subcultural theory to address issues within punk that move beyond the surfaces of style. Where punk begins for my participants is varied. For some, punk may have begun as a simple choice of style to adopt, or a social and cultural organization to hang out within. For others, the reasons are not quite apparent. But what becomes important are the ways that the participants construct their understanding of punk within their everyday life.

This thesis is an investigation of the ways in which individuals identify with, live with, and conceptualize punk. I have used the words 'subculture' and 'scene' most often in this review when discussing punk. Subculture, as a concept, has been discussed at length here, yet I have used the word 'scene' uncritically. I was merely reflecting the language used in the literature, but now I would like to

make a clearer distinction about the way in which I intend to use the term.

I intend to consider punk within the concept of ‘scenes’, as developed by Straw (1991). This term regards participation and identification with a music culture as part-time, fragmented, and placed within a multitude of different overlapping social and cultural contexts. Most often, the term is used to describe a particular music culture demarcated by certain geographical boundaries (i.e. O’Connor 2002). A fuzzy picture of a scene will emerge as participants share the ways that punk has been embedded within their everyday life – in the way that it overlaps and intersects with other factors of their social life and identity. What will be present are several people and the stories that are significant for them – stories that are significant as they relate to punk. Punk is the thread that draws through this text; the intersections of punk into the individual lives of participants are what bind this mismatched quilt together.

Theoretical Framework

Andy Clark

Andy was the first person I interviewed.[3] We were formally introduced while I was out at a bar with my brothers in Waterloo for my 24th birthday. I posed the opportunity to be interviewed, which he enthusiastically agreed to do a few days later**.** Andy sat on the edge of my social periphery when I lived in Waterloo, he played in several different bands and his presence never went unnoticed at a show. Exuding manic energy, he would fearlessly use the microphone to speak his mind, introduce himself to someone he didn't know, or find someone who would listen to a story. I went into the interview with an idea of who Andy was from these brief encounters that I had witnessed from afar. When we talked Andy had stories that were experiential, he felt strongly about the feeling of listening to music, playing in bands, being at a really great show, and talking to people. The personality that I knew was less apparent, and Andy seemed to recognize this.

Apart from working at a local restaurant in Waterloo – that also serves as a frequent venue for shows – and playing in bands, Andy spoke about his interest in music journalism. Under the name Commander Clark, he has written for local newspapers, produced his own zine, and created a blog.

"I don't know, I just get into this character you know? Well my name, I guess, is Andy Clark but I go by Commander Clark all the time. Like it works." I realized then that the Andy I knew from shows was a conscious effort, in a way, to perform a version of him self. The Andy I was interviewing was more subdued.

[3] Dialogue is derived from: Clark, Andy. Interview by author. Audio recording. Waterloo, Ontario. April 25, 2012.

He wore a black hooded sweater and a buttoned-up plaid shirt with a bandana tied around his neck. The Andy I knew from shows wore a khaki short-sleeved shirt adorned in hand-sewn band patches and the title “Commander Clark” crudely drawn on in black marker like a nametag sticker. Commander Clark was manically happy, spoke at a rapid fire pace, and always smiled.

“It gives a purpose, and it gives them a context. Like I mean,” Andy put on a deep, monotone voice, "Yo, my name is Andrew Clark from the Kitchener-Waterloo, Ontario, and I do this.’ It's like naw.” He continued, banging the table after every statement, “Oh, my name is Commander Clark,” thud, “I'm a music journalist,” thud, “I talk to bands,” thud, “It's like, you know, ‘what's going on with your band, I hear you like guitars, they're really loud. Tell me about it.’ You know, that kind of stuff.”

Andy recognized a level of performance in him self when he would interview a band or attend shows. His performance of self differed from his working life as a cook, and even in my presence outside the context of a show. He continued, realizing that while this was only a part of his life it provided him with a great deal of comfort and, as he worded it, ‘meaning.’

‘Meaning’ was a word that came up often in our conversation. When I asked my participants to explain their initial introductions and interest into punk I would follow up with asking why it continued to be a part of their life, and how their relationship to punk had changed. When I asked Andy this he was quick to explain.

“Why has it stuck for you? What keeps you involved?” I trailed off as

Andy cut me off, ready to speak.

"I think it just means something, especially around here. I mean I go to punk shows all over the country, I've toured. It always is the same kind of thing. It just means something. There's not a lot of people there, you know, because not a lot of people have a lot of patience for punk music or that kind of culture. More people would rather, you know, go drink at a bar, or something, or listen to karaoke. But I mean around here it just means something else, you know? Sweating with a bunch of people, having a good time."

The way Andy described how he felt, and the meaning that he felt was present in the experience of being at a show, gave me a different perspective on the way I notice him acting before we talked. His exhibition of physical emotion, in the way he talked, and the seemingly uncontrollable way he would play his guitar and watch a band seemed to be cathartic. "There's like very little that means something, and going to like a sweet show always meant something to me. So I just kept going," he continued later in the conversation.

Later in our conversation I asked Andy to recount a story to me. He recalled a night that a band of his played a house show at his friend's place. He explained the way that it felt after he played, "Afterwards, everyone is all messed up, and whatever, some people aren't. But everyone is hugging, and just sitting around, everyone's just happy. When everyone is really pumped up, that's when I know that what I'm doing is real. It makes a real difference. I mean, its nothing in the scheme of a lifetime, or scheme of whatever, but it just makes a minor difference - It makes my night, you know. Most of the time I go to shows after I'm

done working. I'll work a shift, or work a double, or something - I just want to go to a show. And then I go, and its awesome, and I'm sweating, and I'm so happy I forgot that my shins hurt or whatever."

There was this strange consistency to some of Andy's stories about shows he had attended, or when one of his bands played, or when he would try to interview someone. Sweating and letting your body move to music were key features to some of the stories I heard about people's experiences with punk. Andy, on the other hand, expressed intensity with these connections that was even greater, a physical recklessness where his experiences were so physically manifested that he would move until he bled.

With great pride he retold the story of his interview with a member from the Toronto band Fucked Up in London, Ontario, "I met Fucked Up, the band from Toronto. By doing that I got my face smashed open while I was dancing at a show in London, when they were playing and this band White Lung were playing. They're from Vancouver. They mentioned that incident in an interview they did. On a site they're just like, 'Oh yeah!' The first question the guy asked them was like, 'What's the craziest show you've ever played on tour?' And they were like, 'Well we went to London, Ontario. And some kid like smashed their head open.' And I was trying to interview everybody."

Andy and I were both laughing, "While you are bleeding?"

"Yeah!"

"Oh my god."

"The one guy in Fucked Up, he plays guitar whose name is Gulag, he's

like, ‘no man, seriously, wipe your face, your gonna get stitches.’ I was like, ‘no man, don't worry I'll be fine.’ He's like ‘No man, no man, seriously …’ ”

Another participant, Justin, also recounted a story about Andy. This time from a New Year’s Eve show he attended where Andy’s bands played. Andy’s arm was cut open while he was playing guitar for a band. Blood, mixed in with snow from peoples’ boots, left red footprints throughout the house and a trail out the door as Andy left for the hospital. And sure enough he made it back – stitched up – in time to play drums for his next band.

Nearing the end of our interview I told Andy about a show I had recently been to in Toronto. I went with my two brothers, Chris and Ben, and Dave (another of my interview participants). Someone had kicked Dave in the elbow as he stood at the front, singing along to the band we had gone to see. This sparked Andy to talk more about his incident with Fucked Up, “That was like when I was talking about my face smashing thing. I was still dance the whole time, even though my face was bleeding. And that's the best thing about, like, really good music and going to really good shows. It’s that you can – you almost are superhuman by the way you feel about it because you’re just so happy.”

And in some strange coincidence another band, this time Toronto’s METZ, told a story in a video interview with Pitckfork (2012) magazine about a fan from a recent Montreal show. When discussing the way crowds react to their music, they mention their show at Pop Montreal this past year where a fan hit their head on a monitor, split their head open, and continued to dance for their entire set. Once again, this was Andy. He wrote about this experience on his blog, along

with some background on why METZ is his favourite band. In the second half of the post he writes about another event that happened at the Pop Montreal show, and more about they way he feels connected to music and his sense of belonging to a music scene.

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When I saw them in Montreal at Il Motore, I ended up meeting Jeremy Gara, the drummer of Arcade Fire and, more obscurely, CLARK the band.[4] *I'll play guitar and sing Arcade Fire songs like "Windowsill", "Intervention", "Neon Bible" and "The Suburbs" and tears will roll down my face because I'm struck; not only by the beauty and simplicity of the music but of the power of the lyrics and structure. I dreamed of meeting ANY member of the band, ANY WAY POSSIBLE; I just wanted to feel a real connection to someone who makes me feel so strongly…*

…Being a musician in Canada is really something because the music scene is so small. I like it, though. After the time passes playing in bands, attending shows, interviewing people and generally getting out there, I've come to realize that the small links between everything are in themselves what makes life worth living! I love the feeling of being in a community. It is constantly life-affirming and drives me continuously to go above and beyond the restrictions of my small-town existence.

When I smashed my face, I did it because I wanted to feel a real

[4] Excerpt of blog post written by Andy Clark: Clark, Andy. "Growing Up Commander Buttz Clark," *Commander Clark* (blog). Posted 16 November 2012. http://commanderclark.tumblr.com/post/35847323892/growin-up-with-commander-buttz-clark.

connection to the space in time I spent exorcising my mind and body to a band I really love. I still have the scar on my left eyebrow to remind me…

… Not only do I feel like I'm part of something bigger and greater than my existence, but more importantly, I feel like I'm welcome. And I'll tell you something, from my heart to yours:

ITTTTTTTTTTT FEELS GRRRREEEEEEEEEAAAAATTTT!!!!!!!! (Clark 2012b)

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In the moment of these chance occurrences, in his writing, and our interview Andy expressively shows the strong connection with how he relates his participation in punk, and music more generally, to the happiness in his life. His attention to the connection between his social experiences with music and his emotions suggest that his identification with punk functions more complexly than can be understood through a subcultural framework. It suggests a much greater affiliation than described by Hebdige's (1979) "semiotic guerrilla warfare" (105) or Muggleton's refashioned post-subculture style adopters, and it also complicates the bounded interpretations of punk. His retelling of these stories foreground his subjective experiences within punk's particular social and cultural shapes, but they also present the porous boundaries that his identification strays in, and around, punk. Our interview focused on punk and its importance to Andy. Yet his blog suggests that while he may be rooted at a local level within a punk scene he finds connections with other music, and his notion of a music scene is rooted in "the small links between everything."

This chapter will examine other terms that have developed out of a 'post-

subcultural' look at the social and cultural make-up of music. I will prefer the use of scenes, as characterized by Straw (1991, 2002, 2004) and Bennett and Peterson (2004). According to Straw (2002), the term scene is favourable in cultural analysis for its "efficiency as a default label for cultural unities whose precise boundaries are invisible and elastic. 'Scene' is usefully flexible and anti-essentializing, requiring of those who use it no more than that they observe a hazy coherence between sets of practices or affinities" (248). Straw's characterization of scenes seems to emphasize vagueness, instability, and loose connection. It would be a difficult task to attempt to draw a coherent map of *a* punk scene through my participants' observations. Instead, it would be important to understand how participants formulate their characterizations of punk. I will therefore present a coupling of Straw's characterization of scene with Denora's (2000) *Music in Every day Life* and her other related works (1986, 1995, 2006). Her work focuses on the ways that music embeds within the social, cultural, and personal facets of individuals' lives. She argues that music is "implicated in the formulation of life; it is something that gets into action, something that is a formative, albeit often unrecognized, resource of social agency" (2000, 152-3). I will focus closely on DeNora's interest in the ways that music plays a role in subjective perceptions and individual relationships to music. Investigating the ways that participants conceive punk scenes and how their identity is connected to this facet of their life becomes the important consideration. Straw's concept of scene gives characterization to the social and cultural form of punk that is interpreted and experienced on the subjective level of its participants. This chapter

explains the argument for understanding scenes through the subjective perspective that DeNora's work provides. The discussion chapter will rely upon this argument to further explicate some of the intricacies of both Straw and DeNora's theory through the participants' stories and perspectives on punk.

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It's funny. The best way I can consider it is, like, uh, when you're doing web development. And this is gonna make sense in a second... When you're doing web development you put everything in what is called a wrapper. And basically that contains all the information you have on the website into, like, the box, right? And then there's still space outside of that, but then there is, you know, littler things within that. And I think that's kinda how the punk scene works, as there's the punk scene which is the overwhelming concept and ideology…

...And that's kind of the overwhelming punk scene but then within that there are a bunch of littler ones, and there's the, you know, the Southern Ontario scene, if we're going to bring it closer and closer to home…

...I remember, I think it was at KOI Fest, Kate, the drummer from Brutal Youth brought up this question, and it's this really weird thing to think about, she's like, 'Do you think that there's a whole other scene within our city that we're completely unaware of?' And to a certain extent there probably is, you know what I mean? And, like, because you only know what's within your own social circle and stuff like that. And because that social circle is tight-knit and inner-circle-y, the fact that there's probably another - not necessarily a punk scene. But like I know there's, uh, pretty sure there's a jazz scene around here, and stuff like that

(Emrich, 2012).

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Post-Subculture

Muggleton's updated version of subcutural theory took a direct approach to the work of Hebdige and punk in *Inside Subculture: The Postmodern Meaning of Styl*e. He has also developed these ideas within the ongoing contestations of terms that are expanding the lexicon of music culture studies. Unhinged from studies of punk, Muggelton suggests ways to improve conceptual frameworks that consider the production of music and their social and cultural make up.

Weinzierl and Muggleton (2003) are concerned with the linearity in which subcultures are historically traced. They contend that there are simply too many "(sub)cultural" formations, styles, and practices to be able to linearly trace the evolution of one subculture to the next (7). They are also concerned with the way that subculture is diametrically opposed to a dominant culture. They suggest that current cultural formations are "characterized by far more complex stratifications than that suggested by the simple dichotomy of 'monolithic mainstream' – 'resistant subcultures'" (7). For Weinzierl and Muggleton, the boundaries between different cultural formations are blurred by the confluence of local and global cultural forms, and the fluidity of identity that allows for participants to traverse between them. This leads to new "hybrid cultural constellations," (3) as opposed to dichotomous and linear models of cultural forms.

Weinzierl and Muggleton summarize the new theoretical paradigms that "vie for theoretical supremacy" (5): Pierre Bourdieu (1984, 1993), Judith Butler

(1990, 1993) and Michel Maffesoli (1996). They highlight Bourdieu's concepts of taste and capital, and theories of cultural production and consumption; Butler's work on the performance of identity; and Maffesoli's look at the fluidity of identity and 'tribal' formations. Weinzierl and Muggleton contend that the application of these theorists can help to understand the complex relationships between music communities and mainstream culture.

This complicated understanding of the social structures of music communities confounds notions of identity. The social planes of music culture multiply and crossover, therefore identification is spread across varying circumstances. Weinzierl and Muggleton argue that the identities of music culture participants are "plural, fluid and part-time rather than fixed discrete and encompassing group identities – individuals are able to flow between multiple signs of identity conceptions" (12). Understanding an identification with music culture as a part-time affiliation does not allow for the conflation of individual identity with a singular realm of social life. This widens the breadth of studying participation. Learning how participation in a music culture transfers through other social realms is now an important task to undertake.

Bennett and Peterson (2004) are more inclined to use the term *scene* over *subculture*. They point out the influential work of Straw (1991) and Thornton (1995) as key texts in providing new frameworks for studying music cultures. Bennett and Peterson note that Straw is regarded for taking the popular press term "music scene" and providing a theoretical grounding to the concept. Their understanding of scene is informed by Bourdieu's (1984) concept of "field" and

Becker's (1982) concept of "art worlds." Their approach identifies three categories of scenes, the local, translocal, and virtual. Their approach to scenes regards the "ebb and flow" of scenes over time, and therefore their categories work to understand "the degree to which a situation exhibits the characteristics" (Bennett and Peterson 2004, 12). It is significant that scenes are understood in their fluid boundaries and ephemeral existence, but to understand a situation in the degrees to which the concepts are applicable is a simplification of this scenario.

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I think it just – Yeah, it's tough to define. And even the older I get, the more I steer away from the term punk in a serious sense. I'll use it as irony. Cause I feel kind of embarrassed to be so attached to it.

... I just think of social equality. I think that's why I stuck with it, and that's kind of a definition that I have in my head. It's just helping make the world a better place…

One thing that I kind of think about, or that I keep with me is like a) it's sort of a mindset, or, like, it's what you present not really what you play. And I guess like the founding bands, or whatever, in the late 70s, like the Sex Pistols, the Clash, or the Ramones, they all kind of sound different. I mean they're the same but they all kinda come from different aspects of it too. Like The Sex Pistols were just a fashion thing and didn't give a fuck and tried to get a rise out of people. Um, I guess the Ramones - I don't even know much about the Ramones, but they're kinda just a sped up pop band. And the Clash had a lot more politics

behind them, and were singing about more issues than just girls, or like the Sex Pistols that sing about fuck all and just anarchy. And so even from it's very birth it was so different, like different ideas and mindsets that I think - that's a lot to encompass things (O'Connor 2012).

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Bounding the Boundlessness

While these theories wish to disrupt the rigid structures of subcultural theory (i.e. dichotomous cultural make-up and homogenous affiliation) a flattened understanding of scenes as boundless entities is not sufficient either. Stahl (2003) asserts that the subcultural model of "self contained cultural practices" (39) is inefficient for studying music culture. He provides an important distinction about understanding the fluidity of cultural practice. He acknowledges that boundaries may be permeable to a variety of circumstances, but they are in constant flux. Boundaries in music culture shift and change often, therefore Stahl suggests that the boundaries are an important site of examination for understanding "the distributive and connective functions of networks, alliances, circuits and conduits through which people, commodities, the myriad forms of capital, ideas and technology flow" (39). The fluctuating boundaries for punk can be considered on an individual and social level. Andy made distinctions between his identity as Commander Clark within punk, and the Canadian music scene, as well as drawing a strong connection between the ways that he seamlessly considered the links throughout. These distinctions draw boundaries of identity for Andy, as well as social boundaries between the overlapping music cultures that he identified. Straw's conception of scene will provide a better understanding of the overlaps and intersections of different music cultures.

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I think I just liked punk because a lot of the other scenes there's kinda of like a set. A set, whether it's dress, or politics, or something. Like you see a metal kid and you know that kid likes metal. Like metal is a huge commitment, you're a metal head, you're growing long hair, you're seeing these specific bands and you're going to push mosh until the day you die, like that's just how it works. But I like with punk, I like that there is somewhat an overall consensus on certain issues. Like I don't think you're going to run into like anyone in a punk community who's going to actually oppose the idea of gay people… But I also like too that there's tons of room to flex… There's so much room in-between and I kinda like the idea of just by looking at a person you couldn't classify them as you know -. You're not just a punk anymore, you don't need a Mohawk, there's so many different ways to approach it now. And I think it's the only genre that encourages these different ways to approach it (Krische 2012).

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Punk Scene(s)

In several different approaches I posed the question of how punk can be characterized. I often found myself stumbling over my own words in these explanations, starting, stopping, and usually trailing off. I asked my participants to describe punk by asking them: 'What is punk?' 'How do we think about punk?' 'How can we connect punk scenes together?' I even told them about my thesis proposal and my supervisor's comment, where he wondered what I meant when I used the word "scene", and the next page over I used "scenes", and on another page I said "the scene".

I've chosen Straw's conception of scene to understand punk, as it is a term that is used by my participant's often and his characterization provides flexibility within understood boundaries. Straw (1991) began an investigation into the concept of scenes with an examination of its use as a term to understand music culture. He has subsequently developed the term for its use in urban studies to study the social makeup of urban life (2002, 2004). There are several distinctions that he makes which are significant for understanding punk scene(s).

Straw (1991) explains a scene as "that cultural space in which a range of musical practices coexist, interacting with each other within a variety of processes of differentiation, and according to widely varying trajectories of change and cross-fertilization" (373). Straw's definition of scenes suggests a fluid and unstable environment for a variety of musical practices to take place. He continues by acknowledging the common sets of circumstances and language that allows for "the ability of groups and records to circulate from one local scene to another, in a manner that requires little in the way of adaptation to local circumstances, … an index of the way in which a particularly stable set of musical languages and relationships between them has been reproduced within a variety of local circumstances" (379). These two points are important in characterizing punk. Punk scenes exist locally and the bands, people, sounds, and practices that populate it uniquely characterize each local scene. But, as Straw points out, these scenes are not impervious to the influence of other scenes and a "stable set of musical languages" that connects dispersed punk scenes together.

In the previous chapter I explained how subculture understood punk

through identifiable markers of style (i.e. clothing, attitude, and music). A scene however complicates the identifiable nature of style through the pluralization and cross-breeding of various practices and affinities. As Straw describes, "one sees the emergence of a wide variety of stylistic or generic exercises, in which no style begins as privileged or as more organically expressive of a cultural point of departure" (376). The variety of style and genre complicates what can be identified, or defined, as punk. As many of my participants suggested, the intent of the music becomes a more important consideration.

Another important consideration is the incorporation of social relationships in a scene. Not only is a scene a site of musical production and culture, it is also a place of social interaction. But a scene does not act as merely a place for interaction, it "ensures that the commercial investment which produces new places or rituals for socializing comes to be intertwined with a history of cultural forms, and with arcs of fashionability and popularity which give cultural history its particular dynamic" (2002, 414). The social relationships that underpin punk scenes bind together disparate music and attitude, as well as interaction and connection with other scenes.

Considering punk, as localized scenes, with affiliation to broader institutions of music production, or globalized punk scenes, cannot be accounted for by a mere cartography of the distribution of products and overlaps in sound or style. What becomes significant is to understand the articulations of punk by individual members, and understand the cultural constructs of a scene through social interactions and personal involvement. I will now turn to DeNora's work to

consider how we can apply this useful understanding of punk, as scenes, but from a subjective point of view.

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This sounds pretty cliché but it's more of, like, a mentality towards the way music is done so a lot of bands around here are like really, really DIY about the way they do stuff. So, they do their own recordings or they get their friends to do their recordings. Like our friend Justin, he just does recordings out of his basement or bedroom for his friends' bands and it's just kinda like coming back to that sorta accepting community of - regardless of what you are. Like regardless of what musical genre you're playing. Like we all sort of have that same mentality of hard work towards music and doing-it yourself, putting it out, and just doing it for yourself and your friends so that they can enjoy it (Toenders 2012).

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I don't want to make a comparison with other genres but it is a different genre, you know? And I think that it does hold different principles in both its content, and its formation, and its audience (Barber-Russell 2012).

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Subjectively Understood: What Does Punk Do For You?

Understanding punk through the characterizations of a scene provides the opportunity to address the complexity in which identity is formed in a variety of cultural contexts, and how music cultures are formulated within these complex constellations of social groups. In recognizing these complexities though questions arise in how to approach research, and how to produce a coherent

textual representation of the complex social forms that a music scene is comprised of. The complicated nature of scenes, and the identities of individuals who participate in a scene, pose difficultly in accurately determining the essential characteristics and practices of a particular scene. Using the concept of scenes to describe punk must be coupled with a model for interpreting punk scenes through participants.

In a direct address to the body of cultural studies work that has developed a taxonomy of terms for the study of music culture, DeNora argues for a reorientation of this tradition. Informed by similar notions of pluralized culture, she contends that writing about culture is less significant. What becomes more important "is to observe the ways in which lived connections are made between a potential plurality of cultural forms (eg, musics) and a plurality of social formations. What is of interest is, in other words, not so much *what* can be said about culture, but rather what articulation *achieves* for its speakers" (1995, 300). DeNora is suggesting that the right question to be asked is: what does music do for an individual? This reorientation shifts the perspective inward on the participants of punk rather than an account of a punk scene.

Music in Everyday Life by DeNora (2000) develops a theoretical approach based on the assertion that "music is in dynamic relation with social life" (20). This is a complicated and messy terrain, music inserts itself through social identity, it constructs social space, and it can corporeally regulate someone, amongst many other interactions that DeNora discusses. One major tenant of this book comes from the idea that musical meaning is inextricably bound to the

interpreter, therefore DeNora argues that to speak of a musical work's meaning or effect "requires us to identify not what the work, as a bounded object, means, or does in itself, but rather how it comes to be identified by others who refer to or attend to.. its various properties so as to construct its symbolic, emotive or corporeal force" (30). Punk is personal to me for the ways that I take meaning from it. Punk music becomes part of the sounds of the space where I hear it; it elicits a reminder of certain events; and I create links between songs and personal feelings. What about others? How does punk music resolve meaning for those who identify and participate in it? Punk cannot be considered music, style, genre, or ideology without considering the voices of those who use the word, identify with it, or define it for themselves. What do people bring to punk? What does punk bring to them?

A turn inward on the ways that punk can be influential to individual meanings does not negate an understanding of the cultural make up of punk scenes. DeNora (2006) notes that music embeds into social life, and therefore "a good deal of music's affective powers come from its co-presence with other things – people, events, scenes" (144). This is important for focusing on the ways that participation and identification with a punk scene is made meaningful for its participants and the ways that these meanings are articulated will reveal qualities that comprise a punk scene.

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When I started listening to punk - and I liked a lot of 80s hardcore, still love 80s hardcore - I always used to look at other things and just be like 'man why

is this in the punk section? This isn't even punk, like, this is pretty much metal.' Or like, 'this is too poppy, like, whatever this isn't punk.' Well I guess everyone does that eventually. But eventually you can realize, man, punk isn't - Punk is like… like it's a genre but more just about the ethic of making the music and the community. So when you listen to a band - like heavy - like Exalt or something, it'd be pretty easy for someone who likes The Exploited to say Exalt is not punk. But, they don't know how they do their thing. They don't know how they do things. They don't know those individuals. They probably don't know that members in that band were in a lot of other bands before Exalt. It's just like, people grow up and they realize nothing is clearly defined (Easterbrook 2012).

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Conclusions

DeNora's work allows a shift towards understanding the relationships between punk and its boundaries, the boundaries which individuals place on their identification with punk and the intersections that their punk influences bleed into other parts of their life, such as their work, their schooling, and worldview. In previous subcultural work the sum of an identity is rooted in the adoption of punk; in other texts, punk is the contained topic of discussion. Its significance, level of importance, or its influence in the overlapped identities of participants is often unnoted. Scenes are often considered in overlap with music genre, form, locale, and structure with other scenes, yet the overlaps and connections at the personal level are not examined. Where does punk fit into the daily life of a participant? If going to shows, writing music, infrequently touring with a band connotes

participation in a scene, what happens outside the scene? And where does the influence of the scene impact that outside time?

But before we get into further discussion of this interpretive lens I wish to focus on the method of my thesis that compliments this interpretive understanding that I have developed. The following chapter outlines the details of my methods. I explain how I conducted my research and how the presentation of the text through autoethnographic content, personal story, and critical thought compliment a study of punk scenes through the intersections of participants' everyday life.

Method

Dave Emrich/James Toenders

When I asked Dave to recount a memorable moment from his participation in punk he spoke fondly about the social relationships that he formed through making music.[5] One particular story involved another participant that I interviewed, James.

Dave played drums in band for a few years. One particular show that he played had an impact on the way that he thought about the music he had a part in creating, “One instance that comes to mind: when we played the Arc Battle. I don't know if it was the semi-finals or the preliminaries, but James and Amy broke up maybe two weeks before that or something like that. And we played Good Grief, which at the end of the song it’s something like, ‘I hope you know that I still know what’s right for me, if it doesn't work, let's agree to stay who we are." And it was really, really funny because they both crowd surfed on to stage, jumped on stage, and were singing that into the same mic after just having broke up.”

It took a few tries but I was able to have James corroborate the story that Dave had briefly explained. Dave had emphasized an emotional weight to the story from his perspective as a friend when he saw the way that the music he was

[5] Dialogue is derived from:
Emrich, Dave. Interview by author. Audio recording. Waterloo, Ontario. April 30, 2012.
Toenders, James. Interview by author. Audio recording. Waterloo, Ontario. June 7, 2012.

a part of producing could affect his friends. James finally wrote a Facebook message to me that explained the moment with some more detail and insight.

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Mark it Zero, when they were active, were always my favorite local band…[6]

...So I remember this show being super weird because me and my girlfriend of like 2.5 years (who was also really good friends with the members of Mark it Zero) had broken up like a week prior and although we ended on "good terms" it was still really really weird. I remember wanting to get a whole lot of pent up weird feeling stuff out at that show so there was a lot of circle pits and stage dives…

...I'm pretty sure that we recorded the gang vocals for Mark it Zero's album a month or two before this show, something me and Amy were both a part of, so I knew all of the words to most of the songs and when they started playing Good Grief I was super stoked. When I first heard that song I remember trying to figure out who Ben had written it about, and I totally identified with it especially the lines "I hope you know that I still know what's right for me, if it doesn't work lets agree to stay who we are. I'll never be tied down/ I`m staying free/ at least if I'm not with you I'm still me." It meant something completely different to me than it does now in regards to me and Amy's relationship, but it still totally encapsulates my feelings about her.

So when they were getting close to that part of the song I knew I wanted to

[6] Excerpt from personal communication: Toenders, James. Facebook Message to author. 13 November 2012.

be on stage singing it with Ben because he wrote those lyrics and he played a big part in me getting over Amy. I don't really remember actually getting to the stage but when I was there standing beside Ben I looked over and saw Amy standing beside Colin on the other side of the stage singing too – which, looking back at it, was kinda significant because she was always closer to Colin, and I was always closer to Ben. So we both sang that part of the song and it was kinda like 'okay things between us are probably gonna be cool' and as the song was ending we both stage dove. Then about 30 seconds later I was back on the ground and I remember looking at her and seeing her face all bloody because as it turns out I had kicked her in the face while stage diving (Toenders 2012).

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Stahl (2003) warns that a focused perspective on music culture can lead to the valorization of the local over the global. A local site of music production is often praised for its heterogeneous and authentic culture while global music production and distribution is devalued for being homogenized (39). As I previously noted, Stahl and Straw wish to address connections between the local and global as far more interrelated with one another. With that said, I do realize that this thesis thus far may seem to be a valorization of local conditions of punk. I may very well fall into the same romanticizing trap that Hebdige noted in his look at 1970s British punk because of my personal investment in the people and music that I have described as punk.

The story told by Dave and James bares an emotional significance for myself as well. James mentioned his relationship with Ben who wrote the song

that James sung; Ben is my younger brother by four years. My decision to incorporate this story, while I still believe is significant in revealing the social relationships that can underpin punk, is guided by my relationship to Ben.

In my interview with Bobbie he spoke about his roommate and friend, who plays in the Flatliners.[7] When I asked him about his lasting relationship with punk he too was aware of the social relationships that have kept him strongly connected, "there's a big part of me that gets choked up when I see someone I know doing what they love. Like my roommate, he plays in the Flatliners… and to see him be so happy to be playing music just - it always chokes me up, as stupid as that sounds." I find myself overcome with these same feelings when it comes to the work that Ben has produced along with others whom I have some form of social relationship with.

My relationship with punk is indeed deeply personal. It is very much connected to my family relationships and formative to my late-teenage years. It was my brother Chris, two years younger than I, who had discovered the hidden punk world in Kitchener-Waterloo and introduced me. It is clear that I cannot, nor my participants, discuss punk without having a strong sense of personal investment and understanding. The previous chapter made the argument for understanding punk scenes through the subjective meanings that participants come to understand it. A consideration must then be made on how to approach the construction of a text that brings together multiple perspectives.

[7] The Flatliners are from Toronto, ON. Without being critical on the notion of success at this point, it is worth mentioning that the Flatliners do have a further reaching audience than any other participant's band may have. They are able to frequently tour internationally and have released records through the San Francisco label, Fat Wreck Chords.

The punk scene(s) that have been discussed through my interviews are plural, disconnected, unstable, and osmotic in their transmission of ideas, music, attitudes, and perspectives. I interviewed people primarily from Kitchener-Waterloo; some people had lived there and now live elsewhere (i.e. Ottawa, Toronto, Vancouver, St. Johns); I live in Montreal; the bands and scenes we discussed varied in their locale and size of audience. The process of my research also contributes to this hazy assemblage of attitudes, idea, and practices. I'm bounded by a page limit and I must consider thirteen interview transcriptions that are conflicting and varied in opinion and perspective. I've had to make decisions on what to edit out, omit, and consider, and then present the content through my own interpretive lens as the primary researcher.

This chapter will consider autoethnography and personal narrative as a method for understanding punk. The complex social and cultural makeup that determines punk scenes and subjective perspectives allows for a method that considers the way that punk is embedded in personal story and biography of participants.

Experience, Stories, and Meanings

A.P. Bochner and Carolyn Ellis (1996) write autoethnographic research together where they emphasize that their subjective positions, as academics and as a romantic couple, will affect the way that they will write about, interpret, and research culture: "try as we may to report and represent accurately, we necessarily invent and construct the cultures we write about" (20). Ellis and Bochner are

arguing that the subjective position of the researcher will ultimately have a profound influence on the way that they write about culture. Therefore, the researcher should identify themselves and their subjective position within their work.

Bochner and Ellis' statement also suggests that writing about culture should acknowledge its limited perspective and inability to comprehensively convey the culture in question. Ellis and Flaherty (1992) describe an approach to studying subjective experience as an exploration that presents "descriptions and interpretations intended to 'keep a conversation going' (Rorty 1979). Ultimately, it is a conversation through which we can come to know ourselves and others and the positions from which we speak" (5-6). Through a conversation between different voices, perspectives, and stories I will be able to present the 'hazy coherence' of practices, attitudes, and behaviour in punk scenes. It is not my intention to present a comprehensive representation of contemporary punk, instead, I wish to accept the polyphony of meanings, opinions, and attitudes of punk's participants, and present the ways that participation in punk is made meaningful for individuals. I have also incorporated my own voice into this conversation by providing my own subjective experience of punk, as well as presenting the experiences of others. I believe it to be important to stress my voice as the one who is constructing this project and, in a way, curating voices into a cohesive text that is finally my point of view.

Autoethnography appealed to me because of the repeated claim by my participants that punk is a participatory scene. I value the opinion of the people I

talked to and do not wish to overpower their voices with my own voice. This content is messy, it's confusing, and may not be totally decipherable, yet there is important analysis and questioning that reveals insight into current studies of punk, and music culture more generally. And it may also benefit the respondents as a text that provides a perspective and understanding of something that is, or was, important for them.

My personal experience and the experiences of others have been presented through personal narratives, or life stories. Maynes et al. (2008) write that life stories "are vey much embedded in social relationships and structures…they provide unique insights into the connections between individual life trajectories and collective forces and institutions beyond the individual" (7). This is appropriate for the study of punk because the stories that participants tell reveal how they understand punk. It also provides insight into the ways that the punk scene, as a social formation, factors into the daily life of an individual. Ultimately, it is through the mosaic of stories and characters that I've attempted to convey the meanings of punk, its varied forms that it manifests for individuals, the sites and locations where it exists, and the ideologies and values that are paramount to an individual's conception of punk.

In choosing my participants I relied on my own social circles by reaching out to those whom I thought would have interest in participating. I also made a post on a Kitchener-Waterloo punk message board.[8] I've relied on Tihlman-

[8] astag. "Tell Me A Story: I Want to Interview You." Forum: Fun Fun Fun Forum. *519 Punk*. 22 April 2012. (3:20p.m.). http://www.519punx.com/topic/27127-tell-me-a story/page__p__49101__hl__story__fromsearch__1#entry49101.

Healy's (2003) 'friendship as method.' With all of my participants I have developed a social relationship either prior to the interviews or through the interview process. Some participants are friends and others are acquaintances. Tillman-Healy describes how friendship as method is practiced "at the natural pace of friendship" (34) and within "the natural context of friendship" (35). I treated some chance encounters and interactions with my participants as points of interest to note in my thesis. I also interviewed my participants at length. I treated the interviews as conversations. I didn't rigidly structure the interviews. We conversed, we went off track, and then I would double-check my list of questions. At times our conversations became confusing, neither the participant nor I always had clear answers to the complex questions on how punk is defined, or how punk accounts for such a variety of interpretations. Nor could each interview address each question in the same way.

Music and Biography

Denzin (1981) has written about the use of biography and life stories in academic research. He identifies particular kinds of stories and how these stories reflect an individual's understanding of them self. One type of story that he identifies is the epiphany:

> Epiphanies are interactional moments and experiences which leave marks on people's lives (Denzin 1989a, chapters 1 and 7). In them, personal character is manifested. They are often moments of crisis. They alter fundamental meaning structures in a person's life. Their effect may be positive or negative…The meanings of these experiences are always given retrospectively, as they are relived and re-experienced in the stories persons tell about what has happened to them (71).

I asked my participants to provide some information about their personal life, and to relate a few experiences that influenced their past and/or present involvement in punk. I asked for them to explain how they were introduced to punk and how they began to involve themselves, and how that relationship evolved and/or changed. The conversations that I had with individuals provided a type of 'epiphany' story, a personal biography was described and the participants highlighted moments where their perception of themselves or punk was significantly impacted. Some of these stories were about something that was witnessed at a show, something that they produced, or an ongoing process of self-reflection that the individual has dwelled on.

DeNora (2006) has also addressed issues of biography and the presentation of self through memory. But of course this is rooted through music. She argues that music "is a medium that can be and often is simply paired or associated with aspects of past experience. It was part of the past and so becomes an emblem of a larger, interactional, emotional complex" (143). Understanding participants' perspectives on punk scenes are best captured through the memories and stories that they recount. Their connections to particular bands, songs, or performances are emotionally invested through the pairing of music and past experience. Music, DeNora continues, can be a device for remembering and constructing an individual's sense of self (141). Personal biographies and stories, as they relate to participation in punk, and their associations with punk music provides insight into the way that participants connect punk to their sense of self, and how their investments in punk interacts with other facets of their lives.

Presentation of Content

Bochner and Ellis (1996) pose another point that I wish to consider in an autoethnographic dialogue about alternative qualitative methods of research. The voice of Carolyn Ellis expresses to Art Bochner: "['new ethnography'] appealed to people like me who didn't want to stay stuck at the level of data. I wanted to be a storyteller, someone who used narrative strategies to transport readers into experiences and make them feel as well as think" (18). I've narrated my own personal experiences, the interactions I have with others and their stories that they tell. Through these personal narrations I am able to present the social relationships between myself and the participants, provide a reflexive voice, and emphasize the emotional investment that the participants carry.

In a qualitative methodology guide Ellis and Bochner (2003) write an autoethnographic text that uses a combination of academic writing, personal narrative, concrete action, and dialogue between characters to present the characteristics of their method. In this collaborative text, the authors present a variety of writing styles, voices, and characters to convey the literature, authors, definitions, forms, and methods of autoethnographic research. On the subject of textual representation the character of Carolyn Ellis speaks to a prospective PhD student, Sylvia, and explains, "The article I wrote on stigma convinced me of the benefits of moving between narrative and categorical knowledge…" (240). I've opened each of my chapters with narrative dialogues that are derived from the transcriptions of my interviews. The purpose of these openings is to ground the

arguments of the chapter to the voice of the participant.

In the final chapter of this thesis I will employ a combination of autoethnography, personal biography, and reflexive voice to present several narratives from participants. These narratives will draw together the arguments that I have outlined in both my theory and method chapters. Through these narratives I highlight the way in which punk intersects with the everyday life of its participants, the integral conditions of social relationships in a punk scene, and finally, understanding these conditions with punk's politically rooted subcultural past.

Discussion

Individual Perspectives

"The form will evolve during the research." (Ellis 2003, 239). In a chapter written with her writing and life partner Art Bochner, Ellis' character explains that the form of an ethnographic dissertation could begin with a long, personal story, or two short stories that juxtapose the researcher and participants, or each chapter could take on "a unique form to reflect the different experiences you had in each interview" (ibid). Over the course of writing this thesis I have suffered from indecision when deciding on the best way to integrate the stories of my participants with the academic work articulated by this project. And despite the warnings from professors in graduate classes and my own supervisor I collected far more material than needed. Therefore, finding the right balance between representing my participants without taking their voices out of context, or drowning them out with my own, has been my biggest concern.

In this chapter I wish to address some of my participants' perspectives on punk while integrating the theoretical outlines that I have explained in the previous chapters. The dialogues that I have chosen elucidate punk through Straw's conception of scenes, as well as understanding how punk scenes provide significant personal meaning to the individuals. These brief snippets provide an understanding of how part-time affiliation with punk intersects with other parts of participants' lives. I convey the way that participants have ascribed meaning to their participation with punk. I conclude that social relationships are an integral determination for understanding the meaningfulness of cultural production in

punk scenes.

I've included stories that my participants have retold, excerpts of dialogue between my participants and I, and narrative descriptions of the relationships between some participants and myself. My hope is that this text reads seamlessly from beginning to end, giving a sense of the perspective I have opined on punk. The pieces of each participant's interview are used to elucidate some of the porous boundaries that exist in punk, as well as the permeable boundaries of the participant's personal relationship to punk. This is combined with reflections on the significance of personal relationships in a punk scene, and finally, the ways that these experiences either evolve, reject, or embrace past constitutions of punk's political potency. But with all this said, my presentation of punk remains a partial construction that is very much my own interpretation. These small glimpses into the significance of punk for participants, and myself, elucidate the complex ways that punk, as music and as a scene, "is a medium with a capacity for imparting shape and texture to being, feeling and doing" (Denora 2000, 152).

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When I met with Kyle it was nearing the end of the interview process.[9] I was, in hindsight, aware that I had conducted enough interviews at this point but I had received a number of responses from a post I had made on a message board looking for interviewees. We met at his work in downtown Kitchener where I interviewed him while he methodically screen printed CD inserts for a local

[9] Dialogue is derived from: Krische, Kyle. Interview by author. Audio recording. Kitchener, Ontario. June, 2 2012.

band.[10] Kyle's perspectives were connected to the various bands that he's played with since he was a teenager. He spoke particularly about one band that opened his eyes to what it would take to become successful in the music industry. Kyle spoke about touring, being on a record label, working with a booking agent, and playing festivals.

After asking Kyle initial questions about his beginnings in punk and the way his perspectives have developed, I asked him how playing drums in one particular band had affected the way he understood his relationship to playing music, "In a lot of respects it helped me make up my mind that being in a band wasn't really what I wanted to try and approach as a fulltime thing. Because we basically got to a point where it was three of us, at the peak of it, were still in university. Some of our bigger tours we did right through exam periods and other things like that. Like having to drop classes cause, you know, you take a Thursday night class and then in the month of October you play every single Thursday."

Playing in a band, as it became more and more demanding, had Kyle reevaluate how playing music was going to factor into his life. For Kyle, this moment was the first time he had to make decisions about playing music, "You're in a position - you can either be doing this seriously for the next few years or you gotta kinda drop out. And I think we kinda tried, well I know we tried to kinda half ass it. But we never really fully committed and that just kind of ruined us. It

[10] I should note that Kyle works at Civilian Printing – a team of two brothers who own and run a number of integral music scene related enterprises in Kitchener-Waterloo. Civilian runs a line of screen printed clothing under the name Arc Clothing; they are a popular choice for bands to commission screen printed merchandise; they have run a popular battle of the bands series for a number of years; and most recently they have established a weekend long music festival in the downtown core of Kitchener.

was too much to balance - where you're writing a mid-term and then the next day you're driving twenty four hours to Gainesville, Florida playing one set, driving home, stopping in Pennsylvania and playing a kid's basement, then making it back in time to write another exam on Monday."

"That's stressful. What makes that decision for you? What factors into making the decision that you're not going to put university on hold to, you know, try and take that chance with a band?"

"The hardest thing about the band is just finding a balance. Like a band is, and always will be, four members, even if it's just one or two guys who do all the writing. It has to be a cohesive unit but it's one of the hardest balances to strike." Kyle continued stating that if you want a band to work, everyone has to be committed with as little pull from other commitments. The constraints of being in school, working, and putting life on hold to go on a tour were all things that Kyle did not have to consider when he began playing in bands.

"So it becomes a financial thing, or thinking about the rest of your life, thinking about your long term future - ."

"I think if anyone sees it as not a financial decision - has to be lying. It's financial, not only on your part but especially when you have a label willing to back you. It's like, we could easily write a record in the next two months, take their money, record it, have them spend the money pressing it, and then just do what we do now, which is basically nothing."

Kyle retold a story about when he made a record with another band - a band where he is the singer, guitarist, and songwriter of the music. For this record

he talked about how a friend put in their money into an investment that won't see the return. This record brought upon a realization for Kyle, "it took me a while, but a few months after, I was like 'Man, we kinda really screwed this guy.' And you feel shitty about that, and you start thinking about that, and then the biggest thing I found is unless you're really, really on board to just be a band, it's like really hard. I've got a really sweet job that I like a lot, I've got a girlfriend who I really love, and it's like, I don't want to be away for long stretches of time. I think touring is by far the most over glorified thing in music."

When discussing a tour across Canada with the band that he drums for Kyle mentions, "We were sitting in Regina or something, and you're just completely miserable. It's just not worth it sometimes. And so I'm definitely grateful that there were people who wanted to see my bands and hear the music, but overall I'm not writing records so I can tour and have a bunch of people at the shows, I'm writing records just because that's what I like to do. I like to write music and make music and it just got to the point - especially the tail end of Mockingbird slowing down and when Wayfarer wasn't doing anything - it just got to the point where it's just never fun at all anymore."

With his other band Kyle presented a pragmatic approach to punk where he decided to play music when he could, often with a revolving group of people who he could rely upon to play in his band. Depending on availabilities, the various positions in his band are filled by his friends that play in other bands in Kitchener-Waterloo. Kyle reflected on this new model of playing music, "Luckily it's worked so far, and it's fun, but as soon as it stopped becoming fun, it was just

a chore to go to practice, that's when I think I would stop. But, it's not going to stop me from listening. I still love going to see bands all the time; it's still one of my favourite things to do. I still love listening to records, collecting records. I still love, basically, the punk community whether or not I'm actively involved band wise or not."

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Straw acknowledges the indeterminate parameters of a scene in his papers. He asks how a term is useful when it is used to describe localized clusters of social cohesion, centered on particular places in a city (i.e. bars) while simultaneously it is used to describe "the sum total of all global phenomena surrounding a subgenre of Heavy Metal music" (2002, 248). Further down the page Straw rewords his initial question by describing the sociability that scenes attribute to cultures of production: "'Scene' is used to circumscribe highly local clusters of activity to give unity to practices dispersed throughout the world. It functions to designate face-to-face sociability and as a lazy synonym for globalized virtual communities of taste" (ibid). Kyle's participation in two bands, from Kitchener-Waterloo, adopted two different approaches to their music. For the band in which he played drums, their approach spread beyond their local circumstances and they found themselves working through a 'globalized' punk scene, from Gainesville, Florida to Philadelphia, and across Canada. For his other band (which he writes and sings the music for) Kyle has more modest goals centered on the commitment to playing music with friends.

At the crux of Kyle's relationship with punk bands are his own personal

enjoyment and the social relationships that present the opportunities to create music. Kyle's transitions between a larger punk scene and the locale that his bands originate highlight the boundaries that separate the intentions of music making. When presented with opportunities to play across Canada, and in the US, or to record with money from a label, the intentions of the music making became financially constrained. The pressure of financial constraint put Kyle in a position where taking money burdened him with pressure to perform well and sacrifice other commitments, such as school. When Kyle considered making music locally with friends, who are available on short notice, the intentions of his music making seems to emphasize the maintenance of social relationships, the enjoyment of music making, and finding time for other life commitments. The 'face-to-face' sociability of a scene is an important characteristic that underpins Kyle's participation.

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When I asked Duff to tell me about a memorable moment, he brought up the night that he met my brother in the fall of 2010.[11] Duff's band played with Ben's band along with one other local band, the Decay. The Decay is a band that has existed ever since I began to attend shows in high school. Duff talked about the relationship between the Decay and the Kitchener-Waterloo scene when we chatted, "The Decay, who outside of Kitchener-Waterloo - there probably aren't many people who know who they are, but this group of ten or twelve kids were singing along with every word that the Decay played. And it just mattered so

[11] Dialogue derived from: Black 2012.

fucking much to them. You know what I mean? There's like twenty people in this dive bar in Guelph, Ontario for a band who no one knows about but it just mattered so fucking much. And everyone is just singing their hearts out and it was honestly one of the coolest things I've ever seen. It just reaffirmed my faith in the fact that even very regional backwater punk scenes can be full of kids who take these things really seriously and who have fun while taking things really seriously. And I just thought it was one of the coolest things I've ever seen."

"That's funny, I think you're the third person that the stories been centered around the Decay," I commented.

"See! And you know what it is? I think the Decay are the quintessential hometown heroes because outside of here and Guelph, people just probably - if they've heard of them it's just like 'Oh, isn't that the street punk band?' And like that's it. But around here everyone just fucking loves them, and they're just so good."

We talk about another show where the Decay played. This time it was New Year's Eve 2012 at Ben's student-rented house. The Decay played in the living room to a small group of thirty people, or so, playing their full-length record from front to back, "I just think that's so cool, that like this scene as a collective has something that binds us together like that. This little artifact that in the grand scheme of punk rock histories, which in itself is infinitesimal, but even in that *This Month's Rent* will just be a little foot note, if anything, but for those people, and I include myself in that, it's just that really huge part of my life."

Duff made an interesting point by relating his personal experiences with

the Decay and their record in relation to what is understood, generally, to be punk. I have found myself making stronger connections to records like *This Month's Rent*, and others by local bands, over records from other punk bands. I described to Duff how I've already begun to reflect on my past musical tastes, "When I look back on maybe my teenage years, I even already do, once I get older, and maybe move farther away from a more invested involvement in a punk scene, or this punk scene, my sort of defining CDs or albums that were punk to me, or that are gonna hold that place for me for being punk are just gonna be a bunch of records from a bunch of people from around here."

"Yeah, people that you know and are your friends. And hearing them express themselves is just so valuable. And like it's weird how you can get to know someone in different ways through their music. And like Tyler from the Decay, I'd say he's my friend, I don't know him super well but we hang out now and them. But just reading his descriptions of those songs on that record on their website, it's just like wow, Tyler is all of these things and it just gives you new appreciation for all your friends. Which I think is really valuable. And like even in an apolitical sense it's just a really cool thing that we can have happen even in this little city."

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In an explanation of a respondent's testimony, DeNora explains that the effects of music are not strictly derived from its sonic qualities, additional interpretive inscriptions also determine the effects of music. She calls this a 'describable addition' that consists of "music, plus the ways that the recipient…

attends to it, plus the memories and associations that are brought to it, plus the local circumstances of consumption" (2000, 43). With the Decay, both, Duff and I have attached significance to the ability of a local band to cohesively bind the punk scene. The describable addition to their music is its ability to connect a cohesive group together through moments of performance.

What DeNora is arguing when she speaks of these musical effects is not the observable ways in which music can influence a person, but how the listener constitutes the effects of music. It is through these interpretive inscriptions of music that make an individual "a contributor to the constitution of the music's power" (ibid). Where punk finds its meanings are through the ways that the music is subjectively considered. For Duff and I, we both ascribe the Decay, and other local bands, a sense of personal connection to the circumstances of small performances and the relationship between the performers and audience.

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As I mentioned to Duff, the Decay came up several times in the course of my interviews. What is it about the Decay that makes them significant and what do these multiple perspectives on the band tell us? Kyle retold a story of when he saw the Decay play a basement bar in Guelph for the release of an EP.[12] He described how everyone moved to the music, sang all the words to the songs, and 'went nuts' for them. I asked Kyle to elaborate on why the show meant so much for him, "It's like a mix of everything. Like the awe that your friends could make something that good, enjoying it with all your other friends. And it was like almost like a point where, just like, no one cared. Everyone was just singing along

[12] Dialogue is derived from: Krische 2012.

to those songs, not because it was the cool thing. Where it was just like everyone just had to, at that moment, sing along. Like just wanted to. Cause the songs were that good. And it was that sweet of a time."

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We can understand this subjective understanding of the way a band's music, like the Decay, can be inscribed with an emotional weight as part of the social cohesion that comprises a scene. When discussing scenes in the context of urban cities and social life, Straw describes how scenes can be used to socially map the city. Scenes give "recognition of the inner circles and weighty histories which give seemingly fluid surface a secret order" (2002, 248). The Decay's music is not just a cultural artifact of the punk scene; it's attributed with describable addition in relation to the people in the band and the friendships they have with others in the scene. Their music is made meaningful based on its ability to temporarily unify a core group of people at a show. 'Inner circles and weighty histories' of a scene are reinforced through the social relationships that a band has with an audience.

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While many of my participants had past experience in bands or were currently in bands, Tyler spoke honestly about how making music made him feel.[13] We spoke while I was in Ottawa for the Ottawa Explosion Weekend. Tyler plays guitar in the Decay. He told me about how the band started and how, through the band, his connections to making punk music were strongest.

[13] Dialogue derived from: Robertson, Tyler. Interview by author. Audio recording. Ottawa, Ontario. June 16, 2012.

Tyler recalled moving from Sudbury to Guelph for university. Through some friends from Toronto he was introduced to people in Guelph. He tagged along with his new acquaintances one night to a party where he abruptly bumped into another person, **"**And then this moron with like a swirl dyed in his head, and half blue and half yellow bondage pants fell down the stairs. And I was also wearing plaid zipper pants and so I kinda looked at this guy at my feet and he was like, 'Oh hey,' and my friend Tamara was like, 'Yeah, this is Tyler he just moved to town, he's going to school here.' And so this guy looks up to me, and he's wasted. And he's like 'Hey do you play guitar?' I'm like, 'Yep.' And he's like 'Cool, I play drums.' And that's Ben - became our drummer. And he's like, 'Oh, there's another Ben here. And he plays bass. Let's start a band.' I'm like 'Okay.'" In just a small, chance encounter Tyler had formed the Decay. They later found their other guitarist on the street, "We just saw him on the street. He had a leather jacket with spikes on it. So it was like 'Hey wanna be in our band?' 'Okay.'"

"Really, that's how it worked?"

"Yeah, pretty much."

We talked at length about the Decay. While having been a band for nine years, the band has performed in different forms. It has been occasionally set aside to accommodate other commitments in the band member's lives. Both of the Bens left for school. Tyler also was in school for four years. Now the band continues much like Kyle's band, Tyler and the other guitarist are the central members of the band with a revolving cast of friends who fill in when they are needed. Over the nine years the sound of the band has changed dramatically,

along with their style of dress. I can remember early pictures, and a few shows, where the band dressed in a style that is reminiscent of the descriptions that Hebdige described – spiked Mohawks and studded leather jackets. Their dress has become less apparent as 'punk' style and their music has found influence from more contemporary styles of punk music - their early sound echoes the crude and abrasive qualities of early punk bands. But despite these changes they have persisted.

With all the changes in the band over the years Tyler still found it to be an integral part of his life, "I just use it as journal, it's like a therapy session for myself. I think most of your life you spend trying to make connections with people whether in relationships or work-wise. You know, in some ways you're trying to find, I guess, a meaning," Tyler laughed at his own remark. "You get by in life, you try to have as much fun and getting to experience it with other people. And so, you know, it was like punk bands, people tend to be more passionate about it I think and care more. And I've had connections with bands I would see and if I can have a connection with someone else because of the band I'm in, that's like the most important thing to me. So being able to get that kind of energy from people at a show is the most fun you can have. So it just never really stopped being fun. So we never stopped."

Tyler's passionate connection to playing music in the Decay has not yet dissipated over the nine years, so I asked if he ever foresaw a time in the future where playing would become less important, "Um, I don't know, I can't really see - stopping. I can always imagine being in a band. I don't know if it will

necessarily be anywhere close to the same thing but - it's just - that outlet to create something is important because my work is soulless, soul destroying. So, to me, getting some kind of emotional feedback from people is really important because then I feel like - there is kinda a meaning to life and it's not just work and trying to make more money or get more things. There's something about playing a G major and seeing someone flip out because you played some notes. It's weird, it's a weird sense of - it's kinda like cool, it's like 'woah' you can have that affect on someone. I've gotten some emails over whatever years from people being like, 'That song got me through high school or something.' I'm like, 'Well I don't know why you like my band so much. That's a really good feeling I guess."

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Tyler's participation in the punk scene, through writing music and playing in a band, provides a significant emotional outlet. He describes the feeling of expressing himself through music, as well as the responses that his music elicits. DeNora's study of subjective musical meaning highlights the ways in which individuals use and interpret music, how its ascribed musical meanings are greater than its sonic parts. But she also understands that musical meaning gives a sense of relation to social context. For DeNora (2000), "aesthetic materials such as music afford perception, action, feeling, corporality. They are vitalizing, part of the process through which the capacity to articulate and experience feeling is achieved and located on a social plane, how it is made real in relation to self and other" (153).

I've argued that a local punk scene is made meaningful in the way that

music is socially connected to the friends and acquaintances of the scene. The immediacy of the performer and audience, in small performance spaces and close-knitted social circles, ascribes social connection as an additional component to musical meaning, as individuals construct it. The Decay, for Duff and Kyle, recalls memories of emotionally heightened experiences at shows, and thus articulates the punk scene as integral to the social relationship connected to the music. But this understanding of social connection within a small scene also extends outwards into the more complex overlaps with other punk scenes.

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When I spoke to my participants about how they came to understand the relationship between different regional hubs of punk music many participants made links through their social networks of bands. Kyle elucidated this point when he described the way that his band would play with other bands in the surrounding areas[14], "It's kind of like a blurred thing. Cause you see within every scene, there's the local scene of the people you know, and there's always the bands everyone's friends with, there's always like the unspoken rivalries, there's always the little cliques. And then even outside of that, each one of those bands has their own little clique from Toronto. Like us and the Decay will play with Junior Battles, ATTENTION!, Shared Arms, or Orphan Choir from Windsor."

"And it kinda - you work your way through social circles, right? Like you make friends, and it becomes who are your friends and the people you can count on."

"Yeah, basically."

[14] Dialogue derived from: Krische 2012.

“That's not to say that there are not other good bands out there, right? But it's just like you made friends with these people and that's the people that are going to help you out.”

“Yeah, it's more than ever who you know. Like basically anything any of my bands has ever gotten is cause we knew the right person at the time.”

“ I'm finding that out doing this - getting connected from one interview to another.”

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Kyle highlights how his connections with other scenes are made through social connection. When looking at punk through subjective interpretations friendship becomes a driving force behind the flow of punk music. Through chance encounters and established relationships with others, punk travels from one scene to another. Straw (2002) makes note of the way that social interaction within a scene can forge new boundaries:

> Scenes are, much of the time, lived as effervescence, but they also create the grooves to which practices and affinities become fixed. Chance encounters on a street or in bars often require, to be smooth and successful, the resuscitation of connections or mutual interests now marginal to the rest of our lives. In such encounters, and in their repetition, knowledges are reinvigorated and the peripheries of our social networks renewed (254).

Through social connection participants create networks of friendship that allow for their music to travel. The interaction of a variety of different social circles exists in punk because of this. Each participant has their own social group, and those social relationships that are forged through punk music open the avenues for different scenes to overlap and loosely connect.

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When I asked Tyler about any memorable moments that he connected to his participation in punk, he mentioned the serendipity of several different groups of people coming together at a show in Montreal,[15] "At Pouzza Fest when it was either Junior Battles was playing or - yeah, it was when Junior Battles was playing and there was people from Toronto, people from Kitchener-Waterloo, um people from Montreal, people from Ottawa and it was like - . And we didn't really know each other that well. And we all were going crazy singing along, and we all went out to this river afterwards and had an awesome time and we were kinda just like, 'there's something special about this.' The fact that we haven't been friends for very long, we're all like super friends now. And then back in Kitchener-Waterloo, I don't know, there's been times when we would play, I would look at people's faces and they'd be singings songs that I wrote in front of my computer in my underwear thinking like, 'Oh, this sounds cool.'"

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Another story, this time from Emily[16], similarly reflected the way that social connections had forged a strong sense of meaning to punk music for her. She told a story (not about the Decay) where she connected her emotional connection to a band and her friendships that have been formed through her participation in punk. The social relationships that she forged enabled her to garner favours from others who could relate to the emotional connections that she

[15] Dialogue derived from: Robertson 2012.
[16] Dialogue derived from: Damianoff, Emily. Interview by author. Audio recording. Waterloo, Ontario. June 1, 2012.

felt with punk. When I asked her to describe a memorable moment she laughed, “it's going to be predictable, but it's going to be the first time I saw the Descendents. I'd been waiting years and years and finally heard they were playing a show the next weekend. And I got home and I was like ‘Crap, I need to buy my plane ticket. I need to buy my ticket for this Fest.’” She explained how she was able to get her tickets despite having a credit card because friends of hers offered to buy them for her and she sent them money through PayPal afterward.

She continued, “And it was just like, that in itself is just cool: I have friends that understand how much this means to me and like they've been there before and just the fact that they would take the time out of their day to help me go see my favourite band because I never thought they would play a show here. It was just a really awesome feeling. And then, going to Texas was weird. I've never flown by myself before. But I did that and stayed with my friend who lives there and like, also having someone in Texas that I could stay with because I've made friends through going to shows in different areas is really cool, like knowing that I have someone in a different area when I want to travel is awesome. And I got to see my favourite band, and it was the best moment of my life and it was really awesome.”

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Conclusions

I’ve tried to emphasize the way that social relationships are an integral part of punk scenes. The immediacy of a small scene, like the ones that my participants identify with, provides a social setting that is centered on cultural

production but is also a means of social interaction. The ‘weighty histories’ and ‘inner circles’ of a scene exist because of these social relationships. The porous boundaries of scenes are intersected through the social relationships that connect bands and people together.

From these social relationships it’s possible to see affinities in the way that participants understand punk scenes, they inscribe the music with meaning that is made significant by the relationship with the bands. This approach to understanding a scene emphasizes the individual pathways that a person navigates.

Baulch’s (2007) study on Balinese punk scenes came to the conclusion that “the fragmented nature of these identity practices precluded any possibility of consensual opposition, resistance, or subversion” (178). The symbolic resistance that Hebdige had ascribed to punk style is not so easily determined by the participants’ conceptions of their participation; a variety of factors influence individuals’ participation and they are not synonymously understood to be deviant or resistant. But, as Baulch later surmises, the lack of consensual opposition does not negate it entirely. In the slippery negotiations of participation in a scene, along with other social interactions, Baulch finds the Balinese punk scenes to be “neither inherently resistant nor oppositional, therefore, they were nonetheless inevitably political” (178). The punk scenes I have presented through my participants points of view are also not inherently resistant to a dominant culture, or music industry, or other parts of social life. But these punk scenes can be, I believe, perceived to be “inevitably political.” This is not to say that there is

consensus on the way that punk can be political but it is apparent that the values placed upon social cohesion in punk scenes makes a statement against a normative system of music making that places monetary gain as a top priority. Its DIY production emphasizes the creation of music that is centered on groups of people sharing and experiencing music together.

In a paper that draws from a Marxist cultural studies perspective, Middleton (1985) outlines ways in which past musical meaning can be rearticulated over time. But there are limitations to these new musical meanings, "however arbitrary musical meanings and conventions are – rather than being 'natural', or determined by some human essence or by the needs of class expression – once particular musical elements are put together in particular ways, and acquire particular connotations, these can be hard to shift" (8). There are particular connotations of style, sound, attitude and politics that remain when the word punk is uttered. Punk scenes cannot be devoid of any affiliation to past iterations of punk, but it is possible to rearticulate the past tenants.

I return to Duff, one last time.[17] When we talked about the perception of punk being inherently political Duff recognized that punk, as a means of resistance, is not a universal notion for participants. There are varieties of reasons that individuals connect with punk, "So defining your own resistance is all you can you do, I think punk rock is part of that for me, and knowingly or not, I think it is for a lot of other people too." Duff continued to describe how the resistance was in the way that cultural production is understood in punk scenes, "And part of what giving away music for free does is help to establish a participatory

[17] Dialogue derived from: Black 2012.

community where creative expression is allowed to exist without any need for people to spend money." Giving music away for free is not synonymous practice will all bands, but it underpins the notion that punk scenes operate in negotiation with a variety of practices that complicate how music production is valued. The importance of social relationships for participants in punk scenes presents a political articulation of punk, emotional connections to music and its producers is at the highest value. These fragmented and partial perspectives indicate that punk scenes are understood in varying ways, but at the core of many participants' emotional connections to punk scenes are the social relationships that bind them together.

Closing Remarks

Saturday, March 2, 2013

Just a few weeks ago I was back at L'Esco. The Decay was, surprisingly, in Montreal to play a show. Instead of working on my thesis I decided to go see them play. I live a few blocks over from St. Denis now, so I bundled up and walked through the blowing snowfall. The layers that I wore to withstand the cold immediately became inappropriate for the basement bar. The amount of people in the small space generated a surplus of warm air, which did not accommodate the heavy coats that many people were wearing. Tyler was there along with the Decay's other guitarist and two friends to fill the other positions in the band. A former band mate from Ben's band was there to fill in on drums for the show; we spoke for a bit before the show began.

I stood in behind the crowd to watch the first few Montreal bands play. I watched the social interactions between people in the bar, between the crowd and the bands, and between the groups of peers. When the Decay started to set up I found a place to stuff my jacket and stood at the front. I watched them play familiar songs. I sang along to the songs that I knew, and watched the crowd as they, too, sang the songs. It was different watching the band play in Montreal. Unlike the stories that Duff and I had recounted for each other about small groups of familiar faces singing along to familiar songs, I was in a room full of strangers. Yet the Decay's songs resonated with the crowd, these were fans and friends of the band.

As my life becomes more and more integrated in Montreal, with my own

social circles that are distinct from the circles that I hovered between in Kitchener-Waterloo, it has become apparent that some of my social connections to the Kitchener-Waterloo punk scene are waning. My relationship with punk has been rooted in its local circumstances where I formed a sense of relation between the others in the scene; I made some friends, became more acquainted with others, and semi-regularly had social contact with the scene through my attendance at shows. Watching the Decay play reminded me that I could still see glimpses into that world. Watching strangers sing the lyrics to their songs gave me a sense of pride to know that this is the band, from the city that I grew up in, that has, and still does, make me feel excited and invigorated.

The show gave me an understanding of the significance of friendship as an integral motivation for being a participant in punk. A Montreal band had even wrote a song about the Decay, which they enthusiastically played for the first time in front of the members of the Decay. This connection of different scenes between these bands was not transactional on the presumption of money, or simply a matter of the spectacle of performance; it was predicated on the social relationships that connected these distant scenes together.

I began this thesis with an inquiry into the way that punk is integrated into the lives of its participants. This is a study that is deeply rooted in my own sense of connection to punk. It has informed my social relationships, my musical interests, and my academic pursuits. Therefore, I pursued an autoethnographic methodology. This course of method brought attention to the construction of this text through my own point of view. Autoethnography has also allowed for a study

on punk that emphasizes the plural distinctions, osmotic influences, and fragmented social contexts that my participants perceive as punk.

I have made a number of decisions in this thesis that presents only a portion of the interview material that I collected. I debated a number of choices in presenting my interview material. One thought was to group stories around different themes, such as "Identity and Punk," "Growing Up and Out of Punk," and "Punk Scenes vs. Music Industry." There were stories about people growing out of punk and moving out of the social circles in punk scenes. Other stories discussed the negotiations between work and a punk worldview. And lastly, the topic of female identity in punk scenes was an issue that I wished to have delved deeper into.

I decided to make this through line about social relationships, because ultimately I had mapped the scene through the relationships that I had with the participants, as well as with punk music in general. The sociality of punk music and communal experiences were at the centre of many participants' stories, and therefore presented a cohesive grouping that could center this project. These social relationships I believe are integral to the cultural production that makes up punk scenes, they are predicated on the value of creative expression, communal consumption, and social interaction, and these values often take precedence over monetary gain, while not negating the production of punk music as a money-making enterprise.

I began with Dick Hebdige's study of early seventies British punk and the cultural studies contributions to the term subculture. This is where my, more

critical, investigations into punk began as an undergrad. Yet subculture's focus on style as a signifier of resistance seemed to flatten the dynamic relationships that my participants expressed in their perspectives on punk. Punk had integrated itself into my participants' lives, and they formulated a sense of meaning from their participation that translated into other facets of their social lives and sense of self.

Understanding punk, as scene, was a more favourable theoretical framework. Scenes are understood as part-time cultural contexts. They comprise, both, social relationships and the production and distribution of cultural material. My participants understood their relationship to punk scenes in a variety of ways. This revealed that punk scenes could be rooted in immediate local circumstances as well as more loosely connected scenes of DIY cultural production. Figuring out what punk is, in terms of style and sonic sound, was far less important than attributing an intention to the way punk scenes produced cultural material. The Do-It-Yourself approach to making music with friends, connecting with other bands through social interaction, and valuing the friendships at the root of punk scenes were the most important features.

But understanding punk scenes was not simply about finding out the essential qualities that comprise them. Understanding punk scenes was rooted in the subjective perspectives of its participants. It is through the ways that punk music, and the social context of the punk scenes, are integrated into the everyday life of its participants that become an important site of study. Asking the question, 'What does punk do for you,' gave participants the opportunity to express the reasons why participation in a punk scene is important to them, how they

characterize this participation, and how this participation influences the way they understand themselves and navigate the other social circumstances of their lives.

The title of this thesis, “I’m Gonna Gather Up All My Friends, And We’re Gonna Sing These Songs Together,” comes from the lyric of a song by Duff’s band, Beat Noir. It is a lyric that seems overtly sentimental of the power of punk music and communal participation in punk scenes. But it does resonate with my own perception of punk music, and the perceptions of my participants. This is not to say that meaningful relationships cannot be had with punk music that exists outside the bounds of local, ‘face-to-face’ interactions, but it is this sentiment that, I believe, gives punk its political potency and valuation to its participants. It is the music, and music scenes, of punk that uphold the personal relationships that underpin the production of meaningful musical practice.

Appendix

A Note on Setting and Personal Background

It was pointed out to me that a few of the details of the punk scenes that I discussed were unclear in this text. I of course overlooked this clarity because of my close relationship to the material of my work, the punk music, bands, locations, and, lastly, the people.

My interest in this project stemmed from my own personal investments in punk. As I alluded to in some sections, I began to attend punk shows when I was in high school in Kitchener-Waterloo. Playing music was something I had started at a very young age, and going to shows was an enormous realization of what young people could do with their musical abilities. My interest in punk music has persisted and I still attend shows on a less frequent basis.

My participant's are identified by their real names. They gave their consent to this in an approved Ethics Protocol. This also means that references to band names and locations are not changed either. The reason for this was that these stories are tied to specific people; their stories are easily identifiable as their own by other participants, and possible readers of this thesis from the areas which I have located my research.

While my voice is at the forefront of this text I have spent the majority of my efforts to highlight the voices of my participants. My participants are bound together in two ways, firstly through their own self-identification with punk and secondly to the Kitchener-Waterloo and Guelph, Ontario region. My experiences in punk are rooted to the Kitchener-Waterloo area where I grew up, and therefore,

all the people that I have interviewed have some connection to that place. Some continue to live there and participate in the local punk scene, others have moved on to other places. But this is not to say that the conversations about punk in my thesis are entirely rooted to this place. As I tried to explain, the borders of a scene are porous and ephemeral. What constitutes the Kitchener-Waterloo punk scene is based upon subjective perceptions; and even these subjective perceptions are not always deeply tied to *a* local punk scene but rather a more overwhelming understanding of punk scenes that encompasses the porous boundaries of Kitchener-Waterloo, Guelph, Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal, and so on. I too have tried to emphasis these porous borders by highlighting the locations in which I have travelled over the past years. I grew up in Kitchener-Waterloo and have connected my experiences to punk to this place, but I now live in Montreal and attend shows here. I have also attended shows elsewhere; the connections I make about punk are not always rooted to the specificity of a singular scene and the conversations with my participants reflected this as well.

It was difficult to make precise descriptions and characterizations of the area without over determining the circumstances and presenting my own singular account of a punk scene that my participant's subjective perspectives would be compared to. The ephemerality of the conditions which punk music exists in Kitchener-Waterloo, and in punk more generally, makes it difficult to describe places, bands, or people accurately. The participants' part-time affiliations to punk mean that there are multifaceted social and cultural spaces that they belong to and this creates unstable circumstances. For example, since having interviewed,

researched, and written this thesis that conditions of punk in Kitchener-Waterloo have changed. Some of my participants no longer play in the bands that they discussed, new bands have formed, and the places that they attend shows have changed. This has drawn limitations on the methods I have chosen. The subjective perspectives of my participants could have been complimented with an analysis of some of the broader social, political, and economic conditions of the area to contextualize the punk scene's existence. But these methods must be qualified in a way that does not over determine the ephemeral nature and porous boundaries that I have described. Complimenting the methods of subjective perspectives and a broader analysis of locationally specific conditions deserves a greater consideration that I cannot fit in this thesis, nor could I effectively synthesize at this time.

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