



# MONASH University

## ***Noise to Signal: DIY Music Practice in Melbourne 1976–2016***

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A thesis submitted for the degree of *Doctor of Philosophy* at  
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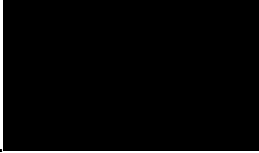
## **Abstract**

This project explores the do-it-yourself (“DIY”) practices of Melbourne experimental and independent music initiatives from the late 1970s until today. Through primary archival research and interviews with key practitioners, this project provides new research into Australian arts practices currently underrepresented in existing scholarship. My case studies present a history of the ways in which Melbourne experimental and independent musicians have responded to changes in media and the technology of music production and distribution from 1976 until 2016. I consider how the emergence of the “DIY ethos” in underground music practices—with its privileging of self-expression in music consumers and calls for active participation in production—has been prescient of the individualised consumption found in the user-generated content and so-called “prosumption” of today’s digitally networked age. By focusing on the local case study of Melbourne experimental and independent music initiatives, contextualised within Australian music more broadly, I seek to address this claim through the analysis of specific communities of DIY practices. I argue that DIY musicians in Melbourne as well as their international counterparts have developed new ways of using technological media in the production, distribution and consumption of music. In doing so these DIY musicians have contributed to the means in which communication and collectivity is mediated more generally.

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## Declaration

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any university or equivalent institution and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Signature:  \_\_\_\_\_

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Date: February 13, 2018

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## Introduction

Music is ushering in a new age. Should we read this emergence as the herald of a liberation from exchange-value, or only of the emplacement of a new trap for music and its consumers, that of automanipulation?

—Jacques Attali, 1977<sup>1</sup>

One cannot really overplay, even in retrospect, the liberating, “dreams come true” force of this glorious moment of cultural *amateurism* for those who partook in it.

—Adrian Martin, 1988<sup>2</sup>

Scrolling online through SoundCloud—a global Internet platform allowing users to share their own music—it becomes apparent that various experimental Melbourne musicians have developed do-it-yourself (“DIY”) music networks facilitated by Internet media. In doing so, they are extending upon a DIY ethos in independent music practices that has flourished in Melbourne and internationally since the 1970s. For instance, we find a precedent for today’s flurry of online DIY activity when considering the global networks forged by DIY musicians through cassette and fanzine cultures of the 1980s, such as *Fast Forward* cassette magazine in Melbourne. The once hand-spliced tape recordings, hand-drawn and photocopied fanzine pages have helped to define ways of using digital media in present day DIY music practices. What’s more, in Melbourne as well as abroad, it is no longer just the outliers of underground creative communities that participate in DIY creative practices. In the present moment, mainstream social media thrives on a model of user-generated content that echoes what was evident in DIY music practices decades earlier.

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<sup>1</sup> Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 141.

<sup>2</sup> Adrian Martin, “Before and After *Art & Text*,” in *What Is Appropriation?: An Anthology of Writings on Australian Art in the 1980s and 1990s*, 2nd ed., ed. Rex Butler (Brisbane: IMA and Power Publications, 2004), 109.

In this thesis I consider the “DIY ethos” as it has pertained to Melbourne experimental and independent music practices since the 1970s. I focus on the forward-looking and adaptive use of media by these practitioners, and explore some of the ways in which music culture has been predictive of coming broader cultural and political trends. My research is particularly concerned with experimental Melbourne music practices that I argue have had demonstrable influence on present and past practitioners in Australian and international arts and music communities. In doing so, I outline a history of the ways in which Melbourne experimental and independent musicians have responded to changes in media and the technology of music production and distribution from 1976 until 2016. Melbourne, being the city in which I live and know intimately, offers a rich and continuous history of experimental music, in which it is possible to track how DIY musicians have furthered the use of media in order to create global networks.

My research identifies parallels between the punk DIY ethos of the late 1970s and the self-expressive, entrepreneurial economies of information sharing that have developed on the Internet in decades to come. The importance of media likewise figures into this discussion. For instance, media theorist Richard Barbrook noted as early as 1998 that the punk movement generally was prescient of what he saw as “really existing anarcho-communism” in the gift economies of the nascent 1990s World Wide Web. Barbrook notes however that these gift economies coexist with and are coopted by digital capitalist economies.<sup>3</sup> In my research I seek to test and develop this observation of the DIY ethos’ trajectory by making a detailed case of independent Melbourne musicians and their use of new forms of media—from the cassette to the Internet. Furthermore, as a key part of my study, I examine DIY music culture’s early adoption of technological media to develop new modes of sociality and a sense of identity and community for participants. I argue that DIY musicians in Melbourne—like their international counterparts—have developed new ways of using media in the

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<sup>3</sup> Richard Barbrook, “The Hi-Tech Gift Economy,” *First Monday* 3, no. 12 (December 1998), accessed August 30, 2017, <http://uncommonculture.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/631/552>. On the relationship between the DIY ethos of punk and entrepreneurialism, see also Angela McRobbie, “Second-Hand Dresses and the Role of the Ragmarket,” in *The Subcultures Reader*, 2nd ed., ed. Ken Gelder (Oxon: Routledge, 2005), 132-139.



production, distribution and consumption of music, and in doing so have contributed to the way in which communication and collectivity is mediated more generally. My study makes a case for the DIY ethos anticipating the user-generated content and “prosumption” of the Internet age. With regard to this broader analysis on the shift from the late 1970s until the present digital economy, my project simultaneously underlines Melbourne’s exemplary status as a city that has transitioned from Australia’s social welfare state of the 1970s to a global cultural centre under neoliberalism and the digital economy. In effect, I examine Melbourne DIY music culture’s place within this broader cultural and political shift.

### **Historical context and background to research**

In describing the subjects of my case studies with the term “experimental music,” I am referring to diverse yet intersecting practices. The term experimental music is a contested one, and it is important to note that interpretations of the term have evolved and changed over the course of the decades in which my research spans. In the period during which my research begins in the late 1970s, experimental music can largely be understood as a tradition stemming from forward-thinking composers across Europe and the US. American composer John Cage adopted the term with enthusiasm in the 1950s, claiming:

I no longer object to the word “experimental.” I use it in fact to describe all the music that especially interests me and to which I am devoted, whether someone else wrote it or I myself did. What has happened is that I have become a listener and the music has become something to hear.<sup>4</sup>

What Cage implies in his thinking here is an interest in indeterminacy or unknown outcomes in music composition, as well as the act of listening made famous by Cage’s “silent” piece *4’33”* (1952). The intention of *4’33”* was not to draw attention to

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<sup>4</sup> John Cage, *Silence: Lectures and Writings* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), 7.

silence, but rather the impossibility of silence, with the piece making apparent the chance, incidental sounds that may occur in a concert hall among the audience and performer.<sup>5</sup> Writing in 1974, British composer and musicologist Michael Nyman sought to define experimental music categorically. Building upon the concepts of Cage and his writings, Nyman classified the experimental music of Cage and its indeterminacy as distinct from other avant-garde composers' deterministic methods. Nyman develops this distinction with analyses of the compositional methods of European avant-garde composers Pierre Boulez, Iannis Xenakis, Luciano Berio and Karlheinz Stockhausen.<sup>6</sup>

Cage also recognised the importance of new developments in media for challenging Western musical language and accounting for listening in his sense of the word, letting sounds be “allowed to be themselves” as Cage would claim.<sup>7</sup> For instance, he notes in discussing the work of Pierre Schaeffer, who in 1948 pioneered *musique concrète* by presenting recorded sounds such as that of passing trains as music:

Musical habits include scales, modes, theories of counterpoint and harmony, and the study of the timbres, singly and in combination of a limited number of sound-producing mechanisms. In mathematical terms, these all concern discrete steps. They resemble walking—in the case of pitches, on steppingstones twelve in number. This cautious stepping is not characteristic of the possibilities of magnetic tape, which is revealing to us that musical action or existence can occur at any point or along any line or curve or what have you in total sound-space; that we are, in fact, technically equipped to transform our contemporary awareness of nature's manner of operation into art.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Seth Kim-Cohen, *In the Blink of an Ear: Toward a Non-Cochlear Sonic Art* (New York and London: Continuum, 2009), 16.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Nyman, *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 1-9.

<sup>7</sup> Cage, 10.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 9.

Thus, recorded sound on magnetic tape treated sound in terms of the entirety of recordable frequencies—not simply the twelve tones of Western instrument tunings. Cage’s interest in the use of media and new technologies in experimental music practices was further developed by his participation in the *9 Evenings: Theatre and Engineering* series in October 1966. *9 Evenings* was a series of performances involving collaborations between engineers from Bell Laboratories and artists, initiated by Billy Klüver and Robert Rauschenberg. The series was the first of a number of events pairing artists with engineers that would go on to be titled *Experiments in Art and Technology*. For Cage’s performance at *9 Evenings*, the composer made use of radio and broadcast technology to amplify existing phenomena in the performance space, extending his earlier theories on listening to consider the role of new media.<sup>9</sup>

In Melbourne, Australia, the eccentric composer Percy Grainger had already pioneered the use of chance in music composition during the 1930s, a decade in which he also challenged the conventions of Western twelve-tone tunings in what he termed “free music.” However, Grainger remained a singular composer and was largely an outsider in his innovations in the Australian music community.<sup>10</sup> A vanguard use of media was important to Grainger’s practice. The composer was known to build unconventional instruments, or “machines” rather, in order to realise his “free music” compositions.<sup>11</sup> Another notable Australian innovation in the use of media for music production during the mid-20th century was Australia’s first digital computer, initially operated in 1949, which remains today the oldest surviving first-generation electronic computer.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Monoskop, “9 Evenings: Theatre and Engineering,” Monoskop, accessed August 30, 2017, [https://monoskop.org/9\\_Evenings:\\_Theatre\\_and\\_Engineering](https://monoskop.org/9_Evenings:_Theatre_and_Engineering).

La fondation Daniel Langlois pour l’art, “John Cage : Variations VII (Performance),” La fondation Daniel Langlois pour l’art, la science et la technologie, accessed August 30, 2017, <http://www.fondation-langlois.org/html/e/page.php?NumPage=611>.

<sup>10</sup> Robin Fox, “Experimental Music in Melbourne: A Definition and Historical Overview,” *Journal of Music Research*, no. 24 (2002): 21.

<sup>11</sup> Rainer Linz, “The Free Music Machines of Percy Grainger,” Rainer Linz, accessed July 30, 2018, <http://www.rainerlinz.net/NMA/articles/FreeMusic.html>.

<sup>12</sup> Museums Victoria Australia, “CSIRAC Home,” Museums Victoria Australia, accessed December 26, 2017, <https://museums victoria.com.au/csirac>.

CSIRAC, as it was known, was the first digital computer ever used to play music, having been programmed to do so in 1951 in Sydney. This development could hardly be called experimental music, since it was simply a programming exercise, playing popular melodies of the day with no input from local musicians or composers.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless it was an interesting sign of things to come. Decades later, developments of the European and American musical avant-garde and experimental music were fostered in Australia through the influence of a series of key individuals with international connections. These included Keith Humble in Melbourne, an Australian composer who had spent time in Paris and returned in 1966 to found The Society for the Private Performance of New Music (SPPNM). Furthermore, there was the composer David Ahern in Sydney, who had studied under Stockhausen in Europe and performed with Cornelius Cardew's Scratch Orchestra.<sup>14</sup> In 1973, the University of Melbourne's Electronic Music Studio was founded, acquiring a Synthi100, an analogue synthesizer manufactured by British company EMS. The Electronic Music Studio served as a teaching facility for the University's music students, a workshop for composers and for research into sound synthesis.<sup>15</sup>

Most germane to my research, La Trobe University's music department was founded in 1975. It should be noted here that in 1974 the new Australian Labor Government under Prime Minister Gough Whitlam abolished tertiary education fees.<sup>16</sup> Together with a raft of other new funding measures for the arts and culture, free tertiary education had a profound and immediate impact on Melbourne's cultural life. With an influx of baby boomer students, the new La Trobe University music department played

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<sup>13</sup> Fox, 21.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>15</sup> Various, *Electronic Music University of Melbourne*, EMI Custom Records YPRX-1625, 1980, LP vinyl record, liner notes, accessed December 10, 2017, <https://www.discogs.com/VariouS-Electronic-Music-University-Of-Melbourne/release/1926243>.

<sup>16</sup> Matthew Knott, "Gough Whitlam's Free University Education Reforms Led to Legacy of No Upfront Fees," Political News, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Tuesday, 21 October, 2014, accessed 30 August, 2017, <http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/gough-whitlams-free-university-education-reforms-led-to-legacy-of-no-upfront-fees-20141021-119bws.html>.

a decisive role in nurturing experimental music practice in Melbourne.<sup>17</sup> At La Trobe, as well as within the experimental music initiatives listed above, musical developments from abroad were directly influential to composers working in Australia somewhat after the fact.<sup>18</sup> The figure of Cage likewise loomed large on the nascent Australian and Melbourne experimental music communities. Ron Nagorcka, co-founder of the Clifton Hill Community Music Centre with La Trobe faculty member Warren Burt, admitted a particular debt to Cagean uses of indeterminacy.<sup>19</sup>

Rather than analysing only the academic traditions of experimental music noted above, in this thesis I am primarily concerned with DIY practices that have emerged in relation to the punk movement, and later DIY practices of “independent” music more broadly. Independent, that is, from major record labels.<sup>20</sup> In relation to my research questions, I am interested in examining these musicians’ efforts to legitimise music practices without formal musical training and analysing their self-conscious engagement with amateurism. The punk movement emerged most prominently in the US and the UK, but Australia also played an important role. The first wave of punk associated with groups such as Buzzcocks in the UK, The Ramones in the US and The Saints in Australia drew from American “garage” rock ‘n’ roll music of the 1960s, expanding on its characteristic energy and abrasiveness.<sup>21</sup> A do-it-yourself attitude was a defining ethos of the punk movement, encouraging music fans to produce their own music regardless of their formal training and background. Indeed, punk style even privileged musicians who lacked formal training. This ethos saw the emergence of punk fanzine culture—cheaply produced magazines providing coverage to punk artists not discussed in the mainstream rock press. It was an ethos defined in punk literature of the mid-1970s, such as the UK fanzine *Sideburns*, which famously coined the

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<sup>17</sup> Fox, 31.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 19-20.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>20</sup> Wendy Fonarow, *Empire of Dirt: The Aesthetics and Rituals of British Indie Music* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2006), 25.

<sup>21</sup> Simon Frith, *Sound Effects: Youth, Leisure, and the Politics of Rock* (London: Constable, 1983), 158-159.

expression: “This is a chord, this is another, this is a third, now form a band.”<sup>22</sup> In Melbourne, the influence of UK punk culture was direct, with early fanzines by Clinton Walker and Bruce Milne being developed after exposure to British zines.<sup>23</sup> The emergence of punk music in Australia however occurred more or less simultaneously to its international counterparts. The formation of groups Radio Birdman (Sydney, 1974) and The Saints (Brisbane, 1974)—with the latter producing one of the earliest DIY punk records on their own Fatal Records imprint—were widely recognised as punk frontrunners by music press in the UK and US.<sup>24</sup>

An abiding interest in British and North American music scenes is one significant effect of the self-perceived provincialism that is evident in music press and interviews of Melbourne music communities during the 1970s and early 1980s. In this sense, music paralleled other cultural activities including literature and visual art, given Australia’s British colonial heritage (at the time, the UK by far accounted for the most migrants from any one particular country to Australia).<sup>25</sup> In short, Australian artists in the 1970s still endured the legacy of the “cultural cringe,” described in a famous article by A.A. Phillips in 1950 as the assumption that the imported cultural article is inherently superior to the local.<sup>26</sup> Such a notion, although originally raised in reference to literature, is apparent in both Australian music and visual arts during the period under investigation.

For DIY musicians working in Australia, there is a differing yet at times overlapping discourse associated with being on the periphery of the music industry compared to

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<sup>22</sup> Tony Moon, *Sideburns* 1 (United Kingdom: self-published, 1977), 2.

<sup>23</sup> Clinton Walker, “Fanzines (1970s),” accessed January 31, 2016, <http://www.clintonwalker.com.au/fanzines-1970s.html>.

<sup>24</sup> Clinton Walker, “The Saints,” The Saints, accessed January 4, 2018, <http://www.saintsmusic.com/scarcesaints.html>.

Clinton Walker, *Inner City Sound* (Glebe, NSW: Wild & Wooley, 1982), 11-14.

<sup>25</sup> Australian Government Department of Immigration and Border Protection, “Historical Migration Statistics,” Australian Government Department of Immigration and Border Protection, accessed December 10, 2017, <https://www.border.gov.au/about/reports-publications/research-statistics/statistics/live-in-australia/historical-migration-statistics>.

<sup>26</sup> Arthur Phillips, “The Cultural Cringe,” *Meanjin* 9, no. 4 (Summer 1950): 299-302.

that of Australian contemporary art. In 1974, writing in the pages of *Artforum*, Australian art historian Terry Smith famously defined a “provincialism problem” affecting Australian visual artists, in which:

There seems no way around the fact that as long as strong metropolitan centers like New York continue to define the state of play, and other centers continue to accept the rules of the game, all other centers will be provincial, ipso facto.<sup>27</sup>

Contrary to this position however, by the late 1970s artists approached provincialism quite differently to Smith. Many of the DIY musicians examined in this thesis, from the postmodernists associated with the Clifton Hill Community Music Centre to the contemporary independent artist Christopher LG Hill, ascribe a sense of cultural capital or value in being outside of the “rules of the game” as determined by the international music industry. As art historian Rex Butler has commented, “Provincialism is an assumption—an ‘attitude’, a ‘projection’—and not a reality, and therefore can only be defeated in the virtual realm of logic or thought.”<sup>28</sup> Australian postmodernists in particular saw in this realm of logic and thought the basis for a questioning of identity and the local.

Perhaps as a result of their distance from music scenes in the UK and the US, Melbourne musicians and initiatives have pushed the potentials of media for the development of global networks. For instance, by the end of the 1970s, cassette tape technology and the increased ease of home recording had a large impact, effectively accelerating a new DIY culture. As I discuss, the Melbourne cassette magazine *Fast Forward* was a significant proponent of the newly developing DIY “cassette culture,” publishing a guide to DIY tape recording and distribution in 1981.<sup>29</sup> *Fast Forward*

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<sup>27</sup> Terry Smith, “The Provincialism Problem,” in *What Is Appropriation?: An Anthology of Writings on Australian Art in the 1980s and 1990s*, 2nd ed., ed. Rex Butler (Brisbane: IMA Publishing, 2004), 135.

<sup>28</sup> Rex Butler, “Introduction,” in *What Is Appropriation?: An Anthology of Writings on Australian Art in the 1980s and 1990s*, 2nd ed., Rex Butler (Brisbane: IMA Publishing, 2004), 26.

<sup>29</sup> *Fast Forward*, no. 6, ed. Andrew Maine, Bruce Milne, and Michael Trudgeon (Melbourne: Fast Forward, 1981).

would become internationally recognised in the global networks of “cassette culture,” which brought a new interest in music scenes peripheral to music industry hubs.

The practice of 20th century “experimental music” was largely concerned with formal experimentalism, challenging the conventions of Western classical music. However the punk and later post-punk movements were experimental not only formally, but also in their attempts to challenge the cultural status quo of music production and distribution, as well as the major record label business model. It is this DIY ethos that draws the practices of my case studies together, starting from the Clifton Hill Community Music Centre that gave performance opportunities to both trained and untrained musicians, experimental and avant-garde composers and post-punk bands. Increasingly the term “experimental music” thus comes to broadly incorporate disparate artists with varying formal and stylistic concerns, as well as from formally trained academic music backgrounds together with those from underground and amateur subcultures. My use of the term “experimental music” is likewise intended to encompass this more recent broader definition.<sup>30</sup>

The term “experimental music” clearly also crosses over into the evolving category of “sound art,” which first emerged in parlance during the 1980s.<sup>31</sup> As sound culture theorist and artist Seth Kim-Cohen has noted:

Sound art is art that posits meaning or value in registers not accounted for by Western musical systems. Unlike sculpture, and to a lesser extent, cinema, music failed to recognize itself in its expanded situation. Instead, it judged the territory adopted by the expansion as alien and excluded it tout de suite. The term “sound art” suggests the route of escape, the path of least resistance available to this errant practice. The gallery-art world, having already learned the trick of expansion and the assimilation of once-excluded modes, proved a

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<sup>30</sup> In its strictly Cagean sense, the term “experimental music” is most pertinent to this thesis in Chapter Two, as certain individuals involved with the CHCMC drew direct influence from the ideas of Cage.

<sup>31</sup> Kim-Cohen, xix.



more hospitable homeland for much of the sound practice of the late 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s.<sup>32</sup>

In using the term “expanded situation,” Kim-Cohen is here engaging with the art critic Rosalind Krauss and her seminal 1979 essay “Sculpture in the Expanded Field.” For Krauss, as sculpture entered the postmodern period, the formalist approach to medium specificity that marked modernism gave way to an understanding of the multiplicity of what could constitute sculpture in various cultural situations.<sup>33</sup> This marked a shift towards an understanding of sculpture that took into account culture and the symbolic, rather than a phenomenological approach that favoured an essentialist reading of the perception of material. Kim-Cohen’s interest is in applying Krauss’ thinking to the sonic arts, critiquing a predilection in experimental music towards phenomenological readings that disregard the cultural and symbolic. Typical of this tendency was Schaeffer, who Kim-Cohen notes wished of *musique concrète* that “the sound signifier signifies only itself.”<sup>34</sup> Kim-Cohen critiques this line of thinking, noting that it “takes its cues from [philosopher Edmund] Husserl’s phenomenological method, specifically from the bracketing-out of semantic, historical, and semiotic considerations.”<sup>35</sup> While my project likewise is concerned with taking into account the symbolic and cultural nature of music practices, “sound art” and a gallery-based approach to sound practices are not, however, an overt concern of my research. The practitioners I address in this thesis, or at least the aspects of their practices focused on in my project, are more involved in music scenes—with ecologies of live music performance and independent music record labels—rather than gallery-based art fields. That is not to say that the gallery has not served as an alternate live music venue for DIY music scenes, as is certainly apparent in the subjects of my case studies in Chapters Five and Six. However my research is mainly concerned with the recording and distribution of DIY music practices, rather than live presentation. This is a result of my research interest in

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 107-108.

<sup>33</sup> Rosalind Krauss, “Sculpture in the Expanded Field,” *October* 8 (Spring 1979): 43.

<sup>34</sup> Kim-Cohen, 12.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

Melbourne DIY musicians' use of media, and the way in which this has affected the distribution and presentation of music beyond any particular site such as the gallery space or music venue.

Having established the background to my research on DIY music in Melbourne, as well as defining the important terminology and context of experimental music and the "DIY ethos," I would like to now summarise the key discussion points of each of my chapters. In the following section I detail my chapter structure, and in doing so outline my key arguments on how DIY musicians in Melbourne have developed new ways of using technological media for the production, distribution and consumption of music. Further, I outline how their practices have contributed to communication and collectivity more broadly.

### **Methodology and chapter structure**

I have developed my case studies through original primary research, as well as existing secondary studies on the subject matter. This primary research has consisted of archival research through fanzines, recordings (both music as well as recorded interviews) and interviews with practitioners involved in my case studies firsthand. Individual pieces of music and performances are observed with some aesthetic analysis at points in each case study, however this is not the focus of my research. For the most part the way in which I have analysed my primary research in accordance with my theoretical framework is in observing the changing processes of production of my case studies. Further to this I observe the ways of using media in which the practitioners have engaged and the development of music scenes, their sociality and sense of identity. To achieve this, I draw on critical literature from cultural studies and popular music studies.

My case studies present a history of the ways in which Melbourne experimental and independent musicians have responded to changes in media and the technology of music production and distribution. In doing so, I have selected case studies that present

exemplary examples of responses to these changes across each decade between the 1970s to the present. My case studies span a period of changing means of music production and distribution, from live performance, radio broadcast and cassette production, to contemporary digital media and Internet platforms. While these case studies offer different approaches to their practices, it is the DIY ethos that threads these case studies together. My thesis identifies broader trends affecting the music cultures of the time, however it does not purport to be a complete history of DIY music practice in Melbourne.

There remains a gap in scholarly research on the subjects of my case studies, and historical details as well as written responses are largely scattered across various archives or in the private collections of practitioners.<sup>36</sup> Where writing exists on some of the subjects of my case studies, it is largely limited to historical accounts and chronologies, and there remains a gap in writing that addresses these musicians, artists, independent record labels and performance platforms through critical, theoretical frameworks.

In Chapter One, I detail the theoretical context with which I approach the analysis of my case studies. This includes outlining how I situate my research within cultural studies and popular music studies, as well as detailing the way in which I employ media studies frameworks in relation to my arguments regarding DIY musicians' use of media. In doing so I provide a global as well as local Melbourne context for the theoretical concerns of my research. This chapter also introduces the reader to Australian political and cultural developments in the 1970s, providing an initial political backdrop for my first case study.

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<sup>36</sup> Past research on the Clifton Hill Community Music Centre includes: Robin Fox, "Experimental Music in Melbourne: A Definition and Historical Overview," *Journal of Music Research*, no. 24 (2002): 15-32; and Kelly Fliedner, "Circuits, Computers, Cassettes, Correspondence: The Clifton Hill Community Music Centre 1976 – 1984," (master's thesis, The University of Melbourne, 2016). Notable scholarly research on experimental music in Australia include: Gail Priest, ed., *Experimental Music: Audio Explorations in Australia* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2008) and Caleb Kelly, *Cracked Media: The Sound of Malfunction* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2009). A useful history of Melbourne punk and post-punk can be found in: Clinton Walker, *Inner City Sound* (Glebe, NSW: Wild & Wooley, 1982). My research will present the first detailed scholarly studies of *Fast Forward* cassette magazine, Spill label, Chapter Music, Gooley On The Inside and Christopher LG Hill.

In Chapter Two, for my first case study, I explore the Clifton Hill Community Music Centre, which operated from 1976 to 1983 in a former inner city organ factory. The Centre was founded as a forum for open musical experimentation by Australian experimental music composer Ron Nagorcka with American expat composer Warren Burt. The Centre provides an ideal starting point for my case studies, as a defining initiative in Melbourne's experimental music culture. Furthermore, the Centre emerged simultaneously with the beginning of global DIY punk culture, where modes of self-publishing and independent presentation were being initiated by underground musicians. In this chapter I examine the Centre as a significant site for the development of Australian cultural postmodernism. I analyse visual artists and musicians interested in questioning the nature of Australian identity, inspired by newly translated theoretical writings from French thinkers such as Roland Barthes. In doing so I examine the Centre as a site in which the foundational motivations—its DIY ethos, praise of amateurism and interest in affordable technologies for music-making—are established for the developments that follow in this thesis.

In Chapter Three I focus on Melbourne's post-punk scene and specifically the *Fast Forward* cassette magazine, as well as a theoretical analysis on the significance of cassette tape technology in global DIY cultures. *Fast Forward* operated between 1980 and 1982 and was a magazine in the form of a cassette tape. It featured new music, audio interviews and discussion somewhat like a recorded radio program. The magazine also contained a printed sleeve featuring text. This chapter logically follows the previous, since a number of key individuals involved in the Clifton Hill Community Music Centre also played a central role in Melbourne's post-punk community, which engaged actively in DIY publication, distribution and presentation. I have chosen this case study on the basis of *Fast Forward's* significance in the decentralised, international "cassette culture" that developed in independent music during the 1980s. The importance of the cassette for redefining the commoditisation and distribution of intellectual property was not lost on the major entertainment companies at the time. Later in this thesis I discuss literature regarding the digital

economy that considers how rather than mass producing and selling cultural content such as records, major entertainment companies today increasingly sell access to *platforms* through which content is shared, via subscription or through advertising. I argue that cassette culture offered an early pre-digital instance of this new paradigm shift of consumption, with Melbourne's *Fast Forward* cassette magazine being a globally influential proponent of this new attitude towards music media's participatory potential.

In Chapter Four I analyse Melbourne's "indie," or "independent," music community of the 1990s, specifically researching the record labels Spill label and Chapter Music. Subsequently, in this chapter I analyse "indie" and DIY music culture in relation to the particular notion of "authenticity" espoused by Melbourne musicians. Furthermore, I investigate the subcultural capital associated with the "lo-fi" aesthetic, as a sonic marker for an "authentic" DIY practice. Throughout, I consider the sometimes contradictory ways in which notions of authenticity impact upon DIY music practitioners' uptake of new technologies.

In Chapter Five I explore Gooley On The Inside, a Melbourne initiative that held over forty gigs, parties and exhibitions between 2007 and 2010. Gooley On The Inside had a noted focus "on young people who identified as women, trans, queer, and people of colour." In their own words, they "strived to create space, agency, audience, support and a thriving, dynamic environment and build a community for [their] artists."<sup>37</sup> With this case study I analyse the DIY initiative as a means to provide publishing, distribution and presentation opportunities to groups underrepresented in mainstream media distribution or from marginalised social backgrounds. Despite an ethos that claims "anyone can do it,"<sup>38</sup> DIY communities in Melbourne and Australia have nevertheless proven susceptible to social hierarchies restricting access on the basis of

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<sup>37</sup> Kati Cubby and Holly Childs, "GOOEY ON THE INSIDE," accessed September 1, 2014, <http://goeeyontheinside.blogspot.com.au/>.

<sup>38</sup> Philip Brophy and David Chesworth, "Editorial," in *New Music 1978-1979*, eds. Philip Brophy and David Chesworth, (Clifton Hill: Clifton Hill Community Music Centre, 1980), unnumbered.

gender, sexuality or disability. The arrival of Internet social media platforms such as Myspace arguably gave greater agency to those excluded from these scenes. In this case study I consider the significance for feminist subcultural music practices of the Internet-enabled “bedroom artist,” and how this reflects the growing importance of the private sphere to the digital age, even as privacy itself is being recast.

Finally, in Chapter Six I explore the practice of contemporary Melbourne artist, poet and experimental musician Christopher LG Hill, as well as his network of collaborators from the late 2000s to the mid-2010s. In this case study I am particularly concerned with Hill’s extensive use of Internet publishing and distribution such as blogs, and take up his work as an example to examine the significance of the digital age and the Internet in contemporary experimental music’s distribution in Australia. I examine Hill’s practice as exemplary of the way in which DIY musicians make use of media in the digital age after Web 2.0. Most notably, I consider the impact of “prosumption,” or the merging of consumption and production brought about by Internet platforms such as YouTube and SoundCloud. In this chapter I analyse how Hill makes use of Internet media in a way that emphasises community building and a form of authenticity like that of the indie music cultures examined earlier in my thesis. In addition, considering the contemporary globalised character of cultural production, I analyse Melbourne’s independent music communities in a global context online. This is in stark contrast to the very localised example of the Clifton Hill Community Music Centre with which my thesis begins. Using the example of Hill’s highly collaborative practice, this chapter highlights the importance of music’s use-value for the contemporary DIY musician beyond exchange-value, including its role in developing a sense of community among its participants.

### **Melbourne music as a cultural canary in the mine**

My research reveals that DIY musicians in Melbourne and Australia more broadly have developed new ways of using media and have explored media’s potentials for the production, distribution and consumption of music. In doing so Australian DIY

practitioners have tested new ways in which communication and collectivity is mediated. In my case studies I argue for Melbourne's leading status in this regard with relation to other cities and cultural centres globally. For example, the way in which independent music cultures in Melbourne adopted the cassette tape in the 1980s was at once emancipatory as well as a foreshadowing of the developing informational elite of major technology companies in the 21st century. Media theorist McKenzie Wark describes this in terms of these companies controlling the "vectors of communication";<sup>39</sup> that is, leaving users free to communicate what they wish, as long as they make use of the provided digital platforms. Further to this, it was with music culture that peer-to-peer file sharing was popularised in the 1990s with the success of the MP3, pioneering the way in which the Internet came to be used in the new millennium. In fact, it was Australia's vibrant community of computer hackers in the 1990s that can in part be credited with this development. As I discuss, it was an Australian hacker who was responsible for hacking the code of the official patented software for encoding and decoding MP3s, in turn sharing it online as a free codec.<sup>40</sup> It is hard to avoid the conclusion that Australia's relative geographical isolation made it fertile ground for communities interested in the potentials for global networking thanks to new developments in media from the cassette to the Internet. In part as a way to overcome the famous "tyranny of distance," in historian Geoffrey Blainey's terms,<sup>41</sup> that had contributed to the so-called provincialism problem.

Each of my case studies shines new light on the work of Melbourne practitioners whose use of technology and media is important for the understanding of their cultural significance. I am arguing that independent and DIY music cultures have sat at the forefront in the adoption of communication technologies. In the case of music activities by independent experimental musicians in Melbourne, this narrative comes to show how musicians working well outside of institutional centres of the music

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<sup>39</sup> McKenzie Wark, *A Hacker Manifesto* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), [032].

<sup>40</sup> Jonathan Sterne, *MP3: The Meaning of a Format* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 27.

<sup>41</sup> Gideon Haigh, "The Tyranny of Distance: Geoffrey Blainey's Classic Turns 50," Arts, *The Australian*, Sunday July 16, 2016, accessed January 4, 2018, <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/arts/review/the-tyranny-of-distance-geoffrey-blaineys-classic-turns-50/-news-story/30477685f87b58523e883f556b40e059>.

economy—both geographically and in terms of representation by a major record label—have consistently pioneered self-directed means of creating access. This has occurred both at a time before the Internet, as well as in Melbourne musicians being early adopters of global digital networking. Writing this thesis at the end of my twenties, I have spent the prior decade—a time of attending Melbourne gigs avidly—at the intersection of the increasing shift towards digital media in independent music practices that my thesis traces. My own connection to the subject matter of this thesis has fuelled my curiosity for understanding what comes next, as well as how it relates to previous decades of musical practice in Melbourne in which I was too young to take part.



## Chapter One

### A Theoretical Context for DIY Music in Melbourne

From the highly localised experimental music scene of the Clifton Hill Community Centre, to the online practice of Christopher LG Hill in Melbourne during the digital age, the case studies of my thesis span four decades of considerable cultural change for musicians in Australia. These decades since the 1970s also mark a period of significant change to the means of music production and distribution. Over the timeframe in which my research spans, DIY musicians' use of media has shifted from cassette production and radio broadcasting, to contemporary digital media and Internet platforms. In this chapter I outline the theoretical context with which I will analyse Melbourne DIY music practices over this period. It is my intention here to give an initial global political and cultural context, as well as to specifically situate my discussion in relation to the local context of Melbourne.

#### Subcultural capital and “amateurism” in DIY music practice

An important framework for the analysis of my case studies is the field of cultural and subcultural studies. The developments of cultural studies at the University of Birmingham's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS)—founded in 1964—provided crucial frameworks for the consideration of music's symbolic nature.<sup>42</sup> Conventionally, in the field of subcultural studies music subcultural practices enact a resistance to the “dominant” culture until often becoming coopted into the so-called “mainstream” that this culture represents. Punk music is a strong example of this cycle. “Dominant” culture here is a concept that can be understood as the social and cultural institutions that reinforce and propagate existing power structures.<sup>43</sup> This line of thinking was common among scholars at the University of Birmingham's

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<sup>42</sup> Ken Gelder, “Introduction to Part Two,” in *The Subcultures Reader*, 2nd ed., ed. Ken Gelder (Oxon: Routledge, 2005), 81.

<sup>43</sup> Phil Cohen, “Subcultural Conflict and Working-Class Community,” in *The Subcultures Reader*, 2nd ed., ed. Ken Gelder (Oxon: Routledge, 2005), 91.

CCCS during the 1970s. For instance, in a seminal 1975 essay, “Subcultures, Cultures and Class,” Birmingham cultural studies scholars John Clarke, Stuart Hall, Tony Jefferson and Brian Roberts provide an expansive theoretical outline of this line of thinking. The authors outline the concept of “subcultures” as an alternative to prior thinking on the category of “youth culture”. Subcultures, for the authors, are inextricably bound to class, and this is demonstrated through a Marxist framework in that “youth sub-cultures are related to class relations, to the division of labour and to the productive relations of the society”.<sup>44</sup> For Clarke et al, the “dominant” culture is explained as analogous to Marxist cultural theorist Antonio Gramsci’s concept of “hegemony,” as one that “has to be *won*, worked for, reproduced, sustained.”<sup>45</sup> Also important to the concept of subcultures is the term “parent cultures.” Cultural studies scholar Phil Cohen explained “parent cultures” in 1972 as the cultures in which younger subcultural participants have been raised and against which they both draw from and react against. In Cohen’s words, subcultures seek to “express and resolve [...] the contradictions which remain hidden or unresolved in the parent culture.”<sup>46</sup>

The most well-known piece of writing to emerge from the CCCS was Dick Hebdige’s 1979 book *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. Applying philosopher Roland Barthes’ use of semiotics to cultural studies, Hebdige considers how music along with dress and argot in youth subcultures serve as class-bound acts of symbolic resistance to the “dominant” culture. In considering DIY music cultures in Melbourne against the political backdrop of a shift towards neoliberalism globally, my research argues for a more reciprocal interplay between political economic shifts and subcultural practices. Here I follow sociologist Sarah Thornton, for whom the music associated with youth subcultures, such as that within the early 1990s UK rave scene, is one part of a tapestry of symbolic forms that make up taste cultures, along with dress and social capital. Reading subcultures through sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, Thornton adapts Bourdieu’s

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<sup>44</sup> John Clarke, Stuart Hall, Tony Jefferson, and Brian Roberts, “Subcultures, Cultures and Class: A Theoretical Overview,” in *Resistance through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain*, eds. Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson (London: Routledge, 2003), eBook collection (ProQuest Ebook Central), 16.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>46</sup> Cohen, 89.

concept of “cultural capital” to coin the term “subcultural capital,” as an impetus for participating in these taste cultures.<sup>47</sup> Thornton’s approach positions the Birmingham subcultural theorists’ emphasis on the symbolic characteristics of music as their strongest contribution to research. Thornton notes that subcultural capital is not entirely class-bound, widening the largely Marxist interpretations of Birmingham cultural studies academics.<sup>48</sup> As I will discuss in my case studies, the participants of the underground music cultures in Melbourne that took inspiration from the writings of Hebdige approached their interest in subcultural style from a middle class position, quite differently to the post-war working class subcultures of the Birmingham scholars. Nonetheless, as Clarke et al have commented, while such alternative cultures are not necessarily class-bound acts of resistance, this

does not exhaust their [middle class counter-cultures’] emergent potential. For they also prefigure, anticipate, foreshadow – though in truncated, diagrammatic and ‘Utopian’ forms – emergent social forms.<sup>49</sup>

My interest thus is in the way that DIY music subcultures have the potential to preempt, or to serve as a canary in the coalmine for, coming political, economic and social changes.

In many of the practices that I examine in my thesis, the trait of “amateurism” is likewise imbued with a degree of subcultural capital. Whether from the self-described practitioners of “militant dilettantism,” to use Melbourne artist Philip Brophy’s term to describe Melbourne postmodernism,<sup>50</sup> to the foregrounding of the amateur evident in online user-generated content platforms. As such, it is important here to outline the

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<sup>47</sup> Sarah Thornton, *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1996), 11.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 187.

<sup>49</sup> Clarke et al., 71.

<sup>50</sup> Martin, “Before and After *Art & Text*,” 109.

various discussions around the concept of amateurism, both musical amateurism and amateurism in the visual arts, as they pertain to the case studies of my thesis.

In his 2017 thesis “The Politics of Musical Amateurism, 1968-1981,” musicologist Benjamin Court theorises musical amateurism and the emergence of the punk movement as related to Michel Foucault’s writings on the inseparability of knowledge and power. For Court, musical amateurism exists after Foucault as a form of “subjugated knowledge.” These are forms of knowledge that Court explains include “erudite knowledge” and “local” or “popular” knowledge that are subjugated “because they involve a struggle with power.”<sup>51</sup> Like Court, I consider the significance of amateurism and the democratisation of musical practices as characteristic of post-1968 criticism of the hegemony of mass culture. Court’s research provides a useful literature review of existing scholarly research on musical amateurism, from the fields of ethnomusicology, music education, and sociology. In a point that is particularly relevant to my arguments about the impact of changes in labour and leisure since the late 1970s, Court notes that for sociologist Robert A. Stebbins, musical amateurism is “the result of an inevitable blurring of work and leisure in everyday life.”<sup>52</sup>

In relation to musical amateurism and the use of media and technology, music critic and academic Adam Harper also theorises a form of amateurism in context with the relation between knowledge and power. Considering musicians that ascribe value to low-fidelity production and recording techniques, Harper considers this value in relation with countercultural theorist Theodor Roszak’s writings on technocracy. For music cultures that view themselves in opposition to the dominant culture, high-fidelity and skilled recording and music production is associated with a high degree of technocracy. Lower-skilled music recording and production is associated with a decrease in technocracy, viewed favourably.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Benjamin Court, “The Politics of Musical Amateurism, 1968-1981,” (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2017), 5.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>53</sup> Adam Harper, “Lo-Fi Aesthetics in Popular Music Discourse,” (PhD thesis, University of Oxford, 2014), 13-15.

In the visual arts, differing yet related discourses surrounding the foregrounding of the amateur are relevant here. The British art theorist John Roberts has traced the privileging of amateurism in the visual arts from art's professionalisation in the mid-19th century, through to the avant-garde. An undeclared affinity with technical amateurism existed for Modernist painters in France of the 1860s and 1870s as a result of their tenuous position with regard to the bourgeois and aristocratic social classes. As Roberts explains:

The new market forces may have relieved the artist of some of the burdens of subordination to state and church, but they also left the independent modern artist exposed to the indifference, even antagonism, of a diminishing, bourgeois audience. The new intellectual professionalization of the artist, therefore, was felt to be something of a sham once artists were faced with the real material outcomes of their distance from the Salon and the Academy.<sup>54</sup>

While artists of this time did not wish to be regarded as “amateurs,” a feigning of technical incompetence began to emerge in part to challenge the limits of academic professionalism and its styles. Or as Roberts notes,

by withholding a professionally imposed facility the artist would secure a greater vivacity and authenticity to the act of painting that would be in keeping with the artist's displaced or marginalized standing.<sup>55</sup>

Roberts' statement here links amateurism to a degree of perceived authenticity, as a discussion that is connected to the will to operate outside of and subsequently challenge dominant institutions and societal structures of power. This line of thinking is reflected in various Melbourne musical discourses around amateurism, from the

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<sup>54</sup> John Roberts, “The Amateur's Retort,” in *Amateurs*, eds. Grace Kook-Anderson and Claire Fitzsimmons, (San Francisco: CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, 2008), 15.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

“militant dilettante” postmodernists of Clifton Hill to “indie” musicians praising the “lo-fi” aesthetic.

## **Media and its relation to DIY music practice in Melbourne**

Throughout my local Melbourne case studies, the role of media is crucial to my argument that DIY musicians preempt broader cultural and political trends in their practices. I argue that it is precisely through DIY musicians’ new ways of using media that these coming changes are first apparent. With this in mind, it is here worth discussing German media theorist and poet Hans Magnus Enzensberger, who aptly foregrounds media’s potential to cause significant shifts in the economy and in consumption. In his essay “Constituents of a Theory of the Media” (1974) he declares:

It is wrong to regard media equipment as mere means of consumption. It is always, in principle, also means of production and, indeed, since it is in the hands of the masses, socialized means of production.<sup>56</sup>

Enzensberger’s text is a critique of what he regards as a blind spot in Marxist theory and the socialist movement towards new forms of media, an ignorance that he sees as ignoring media’s potential for political mobilisation and allowing it to tend towards depoliticised commercialism. Enzensberger defines media industries—such as print media, television, radio and electronic media—broadly as an increasingly unifying “consciousness industry,” controlling the sharing of information and hence the shaping of “consciousness.” The consciousness industry upholds a manufactured division between producers and consumers that is “artificially reinforced by economic and administrative measures,”<sup>57</sup> one that is not inherent in the material properties of potentially decentralised media itself. For Enzensberger, radio’s capabilities for decentralisation in the sharing of information can become a radical tool for the

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<sup>56</sup> Hans Magnus Enzensberger, “Constituents of a Theory of the Media,” in *The New Media Reader*, eds. Nick Montfort and Noah Wardrip-Fruin (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2003), 266.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 266.

political mobilisation of the masses. This was a potential that even at his time of writing in the 1970s was not entirely new, as Enzensberger himself points to Bertolt Brecht outlining this latent potential in radio decades earlier.<sup>58</sup> However, Enzensberger notes that new forms of media cannot in themselves be a means to an end for bringing about an egalitarian restructuring of society, stating that:

Anyone who imagines that freedom for the media will be established if only everyone is busy transmitting and receiving is the dupe of a liberalism which, decked out in contemporary colors, merely peddles the faded concepts of a preordained harmony of social interests.<sup>59</sup>

For Enzensberger, participatory media's potential lies in its decentralised sharing of information for the political mobilisation of the masses. Enzensberger forecasts the potentials of interactivity in media that radio first made apparent. Enzensberger's cautionary note here is likewise echoed in the speculations of French economist and political theorist Jacques Attali, who comments that:

Music is ushering in a new age. Should we read this emergence as the herald of a liberation from exchange-value, or only of the emplacement of a new trap for music and its consumers, that of automanipulation? The answer to these questions, I think, depends on the radicality of the experiment. Inducing people to compose using predefined instruments cannot lead to a mode of production different from that authorized by those instruments.<sup>60</sup>

Attali, in mentioning "instruments" here, essentially speculates that it is the nature of music's coming media that will determine its liberatory potential from exchange-value.

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 261.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 267.

<sup>60</sup> Attali, *Noise*, 141.

In Melbourne, the way in which DIY music cultures in the late 1970s and early 1980s embraced fanzine publication and distribution, as well as the cassette tape for home taping, reveals a pre-digital cultural precedent in music subcultures for “productive-consumption.” With this argument, I contribute to recent research in the field of media studies with regard to digital labour. In the DIY music practices of my thesis, I consider how participation in these music cultures can be read through media theorist Tiziana Terranova’s concept of “free labour.” As I outline in Chapter Six, for Terranova digital platforms have facilitated the visual subordination, but not disappearance, of labour, in which individuals voluntarily participate in unpaid labour practices.<sup>61</sup> This occurs as individuals see such work not as unpaid labour, but rather as a leisure activity with the reward of feeling a sense of community participation. Examples given by Terranova of this include open source programming or administrating online chatboards. Like the online peer-to-peer communities examined by Terranova, I argue that subcultural participation, with its valuing of participating in a community, is a space of free labour. As I discuss from Chapter Three onwards, media theorist McKenzie Wark has argued that the way in which contemporary online digital platforms (such as social media) exploit this tendency, is indicative of an emergent ruling class among those who control digital platforms, or the “vectors” of communication.<sup>62</sup> I argue that DIY musicians in Melbourne foreshadowed this emphasis on the platform with their use of media such as the cassette tape. Melbourne, due to its geographical position, has been uniquely placed to test the global networking potentials of media in its DIY music practices.

In analysing the emergence of the cassette tape and its effect on Melbourne independent music cultures in my early case studies, I seek to demonstrate the early DIY ethos and cassette culture as a precursor to the developments of Internet music distribution. In turn, Internet distribution is discussed in greater depth in the latter part of my thesis that looks at more recent examples. In these cases, my consideration of

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<sup>61</sup> Tiziana Terranova, *Network Culture: Politics for the Information Age* (Ann Arbor, MI: Pluto Press, 2004), 90.

<sup>62</sup> Wark, *A Hacker Manifesto*, [032].



music's symbolic qualities always takes place in terms of music's relationship to media, as not just a message within a certain context, but with the agency to define new ways of using media and to affect this certain context.

### **The DIY ethos and its significance with relation to political and economic changes during the period under investigation**

Over the course of my thesis I trace what I consider to be the prescience of the “DIY ethos” in music of user-generated content in the Internet age. I ask what role media—specifically DIY music cultures’ adoption of new forms of media from the cassette to the Internet—plays in understanding music culture’s potential forecasting of broader cultural, political as well as economic changes. Here it is therefore important to define and discuss the key political and economic shift towards neoliberalism during the period of my research, as well as related theoretical and cultural developments as a result.

As a theoretical starting point in my first case study I critically engage with Jacques Attali’s *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, published in 1977 at the time in which the period of my research begins. Writing during a post-1968 climate of disillusionment with mass consumer culture, Attali’s rhetoric echoes a resentment expressed by other French philosophers at the time, such as Jean Baudrillard.<sup>63</sup> This resentment was targeted towards what they saw as the normalising—or one could say more specifically *Americanising*—qualities of these mass-produced goods and culture.<sup>64</sup> These thinkers typically expressed an ethos of anti-conformism, for unique cultures as opposed to the totalising aesthetic of American mass culture. Alongside this cultural disillusionment, capitalism was in a global state of economic recession in the mid-1970s. This was a conflated consequence of the 1973 oil crisis, rising

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<sup>63</sup> Douglas Kellner, “Jean Baudrillard,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2015), accessed January 4, 2018, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2015/entries/ baudrillard/>.

<sup>64</sup> For a further discussion of this tendency see Kristen Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1995), 4-6, 24.

unemployment and increasing inflation, a result of the crisis of capital accumulation within a failing Fordist-Keynesian system.<sup>65</sup> So there was a sense that a new politics would need to take shape.

In the Melbourne context, such post-1968 writings by French philosophers began to play a role in the art and music communities of my research. “French theory” was adopted in the late 1970s in its newly and selectively available English translations to a young community of artists and musicians, distilled in part through the newly founded La Trobe University and its cinema course.<sup>66</sup> Some of these translations had in fact been made by Australian writers, and saw their first outings in small local publications and art journals.<sup>67</sup> Roland Barthes’ semiology of “myth” creation—with its keen analysis of popular culture—was a strong influence on this generation. Various Melbourne writers and artists referenced Barthes’ writings and use of semiotics, particularly welcoming their application in cultural studies such as Hebdige’s aforementioned *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*.<sup>68</sup> This generation of artists and musicians took as their *modus operandi* the ideas of quotation, appropriation and *bricolage* over the Modernist imperative to “make it new.” In turn, they provided an Australian counterpart to the postmodernist artists working concurrently abroad. For example American artists including Sherrie Levine, Barbara Kruger, Richard Prince and Cindy Sherman, who came to be known as the “Pictures Generation” (named after

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<sup>65</sup> David Harvey, “Neoliberalism as Creative Destruction,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 610, (2007): 27. Fordism, after Henry Ford of Ford Motors, relates to a system of mass production facilitated by rationalised production processes and waged workers (as implemented by Henry Ford in his automobile production). Fordism grew in the 20th century in conjunction with Keynesian policies on economic regulation. Keynesianism refers to the British economist John Maynard Keynes, whose economic theories held that state regulation of markets was necessary to ensure a stable economy and employment. After the Second World War the US became the dominant global economy in terms of productivity and political influence with its Fordist-Keynesian policies, and its mass-produced goods that were exported globally. David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1990), 125-140. David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 10-12.

<sup>66</sup> David Chesworth, interview by Jared Davis, Melbourne, March 10, 2016, audio recording.

<sup>67</sup> For instance, the English translation of Baudrillard’s essay “The Precession of Simulacra” in 1983 was undertaken by Australians, the critic Paul Foss and academic Paul Patton. Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations*, trans. Paul Foss, Paul Patton and Philip Beitchman (New York: Semiotext[e], 1983).

<sup>68</sup> See Chapter Two for further discussion of Hebdige’s influence on Melbourne musicians and writers.

curator Douglas Crimp's seminal 1977 group exhibition in New York, "Pictures").<sup>69</sup> As the art writer and curator Paul Taylor wrote in his 1981 essay "Australian New Wave and the Second Degree,"

many young [Australian] artists are juggling with Modernist conventions – retrieving and synthesising them while collectively "forgetting" the conditions which spawned them. In this context, these artists are directing our attention to the question of Modernism's decline.<sup>70</sup>

I am interested in exploring over the course of my case studies how the DIY ethos, rather than offering a route out of consumer capitalism, has instead become characteristic of contemporary individualised consumption under neoliberalism. In order to understand this shift, we need to come to terms with the significant economic "reforms" that ensued in the years during the period of my research. The period from the late 1970s through the 1980s, under the rule of Margaret Thatcher's government in the UK and the Ronald Reagan administration in US, led to radical political and economic changes in order to ensure capitalism's global dominance. These were changes towards what we now refer to as neoliberalism.<sup>71</sup> Economically, the neoliberal project emphasised market freedom from government regulation, including "free" trade and a winding back of union power and the security of waged workers. The result was ushering in increasingly casual and precarious employment, alongside a competitiveness that places a particular value on innovative entrepreneurialism. Developments in global trade also ensured that "work" in the Western world shifted increasingly towards knowledge and service-based activities.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Gary Indiana, "These '80s Artists Are More Important Than Ever," *T: The New York Times Style Magazine*, February 13, 2017, accessed January 4, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/13/t-magazine/pictures-generation-new-york-artists-cindy-sherman-robert-longo.html>.

<sup>70</sup> Paul Taylor, "Australian New Wave and the 'Second Degree'," in *Anything Goes: Art in Australia 1970-1980*, ed. Paul Taylor (Melbourne: Art & Text, 1984), 159.

<sup>71</sup> Harvey, "Neoliberalism as Creative Destruction," 22-23.

<sup>72</sup> Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 150-156.

The local political climate in Melbourne, assisted by a relatively more insulated and buoyant national economy, was a few years late to these changes. The controversial dismissal of Australia's left-of-centre Labor Prime Minister Gough Whitlam by Australia's Governor General in 1975 led to several years of government by Australia's centre-right Liberal Party in coalition with the rural National Country Party, under Liberal Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser. While the Fraser Government did seek to slim the public sector, Australian arts funding, which had expanded massively in the early 1970s, did not change drastically.<sup>73</sup> In 1979, concurrently with the beginnings of Thatcher's Britain, the Fraser Government commissioned an enquiry into the Australian financial system that made several recommendations to move Australia towards what we now call neoliberalism. The enquiry, known as the Campbell Committee, delivered its report in 1981, suggesting state deregulation of interest rates, floating the Australian dollar, and increasing the ease of global banks from operating in Australia. However, it was not until the Australian Labor Party was returned to government in 1983 that new Prime Minister Bob Hawke and his Treasurer Paul Keating put the recommendations of this report into practice.<sup>74</sup> In this sense, the original punk call to arms in Australia was largely removed from the class politics of, for example, UK punk under Thatcher. In Brisbane, punk occurred under the shadow of a notoriously repressive and conservative Queensland Premier, Joh Bjelke-Petersen, who held office between 1968 and 1987 and was known for using police force against street demonstrators.<sup>75</sup> In Melbourne, punk is best understood more simply as a new form of music production and mode of subcultural self-expression.

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<sup>73</sup> Australian Government Department of the Parliamentary Library, *Arts Policy in Australia: A History of Commonwealth Involvement in the Arts* (Canberra: Australian Government, 1994), 11-12.

<sup>74</sup> Not necessarily betraying the party's roots with the labour movement, Hawke and Keating developed an Accord with the Australian Council of Trade Unions that ensured the economic reforms of the 1980s were approved by the union movement. Hawke and Keating also continued to pursue social reforms with the stimulated economy of their economic reforms. With the benefit of hindsight however, we see how the reforms of this period opened Australia to a global neoliberal economic order that would have strong ramifications for Australian workers' rights and social welfare, as well as for the nature of music and arts practice in this climate. Joe Collins and Drew Cottle, "Labor Neoliberals or Pragmatic Neo-Laborists? The Hawke and Keating Labor Governments in Office, 1983-96," *Labour History: A Journal of Labour and Social History*, no. 98 (May 2010): 32-35.

<sup>75</sup> Everett True, "Prehistoric: The Punk and Politics of Brisbane's Darkest Days Rebooted," Australia Culture Blog, *The Guardian*, Wednesday September 24, 2014, accessed January 4, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2014/sep/24/preshistoric-brisbane-punk-and-politics-1970s>.

However, in common with other cities that became centres of punk culture, such as London, its cultural influence has been significant and ongoing across cultural fields such as fashion, design and art as well as music.

Throughout my thesis I am interested in analysing the link between the DIY ethos in music and the emergence of neoliberalism. This can be established through a critical reading of Attali's concept of "composition". Attali's argument considers music as having the potential to "destroy a social order and replace it with a new one."<sup>76</sup> His book examines Western music's entry into market exchange with the early emergence of capitalism, and the subsequent loss of music's initial function in ritual. At the time of his writing, Attali was critical of the mass culture of the 20th century recording industry, for its turning music into pure exchange-value, in that consumers are encouraged to purchase more records than they have time to listen to.<sup>77</sup> In response, Attali predicted a mode of consumption that he terms "composition."

"Composition"—despite being a loaded musical term—is used loosely, but it is indicative of a shifting emphasis from consumption towards the creative act and production. Attali proposed that the economy of music should no longer be one of musicians creating "moulds" for "repetition"<sup>78</sup> and stockpiling as recorded music commodities, then sold to passive (or in Attali's words, "silenced")<sup>79</sup> consumers.<sup>80</sup> Rather, under the reign of "composition" music becomes something for listeners to directly create themselves. Subsequently, individuals may derive meaning and pleasure from their active involvement with music, rather than being party to passive consumption. While the way in which "composition" may occur remains speculative for Attali, I argue that both the "DIY ethos" that emerged with the punk movement and neoliberal notions of individual consumption strongly echo Attali's concept. The link

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<sup>76</sup> Attali, *Noise*, 33. This is an argument that Attali himself identifies as having been suggested in the past, giving the example of a similar assertion by the Greek philosopher Plato. Ibid., 34.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>80</sup> "Repetition" is a term that has a specific use here by Attali, to denote the mass culture tendency of the recording industry.

between Attali's concept of "composition" and punk is an observation made briefly by musicologist Susan McClary in her 1985 afterword to the English translation of *Noise*.<sup>81</sup> McClary notes that the punk movement had "precisely the motivation suggested by Attali at his most optimistic and with the mixed results he also realistically anticipated."<sup>82</sup> This comment is made in relation to punk's ultimate cooptation by the major recording industry, rather than serving as a route out of consumer capitalism. While McClary's observations are brief, with further benefit of hindsight, I am better placed than McClary to consider the wider shifts towards neoliberalism and how this adds further complexity to the market cooptation of punk and its DIY ethos.

Philosopher and sound studies scholar Robin James has argued that Attali's observations reflect that of his contemporary, the philosopher Michel Foucault.<sup>83</sup> In *Noise*, Attali makes mention of Foucault only once. It is a very brief mention of Foucault's *The Order of Things* (1970) in an endnote, unrelated to Foucault's later Collège de France lectures that James rather refers to.<sup>84</sup> Nonetheless, James argues for an understanding of Attali's critique of the era of "repetition" as similar to Foucault's critique of "biopolitics." Foucault defines biopolitics as "a matter of taking control of life and the biological processes of man-as-species and of ensuring that they are not disciplined, but regularized."<sup>85</sup> Identifying one comment in particular, James notes the remarkable similarity of Attali's thinking to that of Foucault, in which Attali states that "the biological sciences were the first to tackle this problem" of what Attali terms "repetition," or rather "the conditions of the replication of life."<sup>86</sup> <sup>87</sup> What's more,

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<sup>81</sup> Attali, *Noise*, 156-157.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 156.

<sup>83</sup> James, 138-139.

<sup>84</sup> Attali, *Noise*, 164.

<sup>85</sup> Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège De France, 1975-76* (New York: Picador, 2003), 246-247.

<sup>86</sup> Attali, *Noise*, 89.

<sup>87</sup> Later writing by Attali has expressed this biopolitical control in greater detail. In his 2006 book *Brief History of the Future*, Attali speculates on how that the diminished role of the welfare state in the 21st century and increased data-monitoring of personal health will lead to regimes of self-surveillance with regard to health and

James links the entrepreneurial individualism of Attali's "composition" to neoliberalism itself, noting: "Attalian composition, both as a practice of the self and as a mode of mid-20th-century Western musical production and consumption, is a type of *deregulatory neoliberalism*".<sup>88</sup> James is critical of Attali's Marxist historicism, and suggestion of a causal relationship between music and political economy, stating rather that music and political economy are "both manifestations of broader epistemic shifts that cannot be pinned down to singular, coherently identifiable causes".<sup>89</sup> While I am in some senses in agreement with this careful observation, throughout my analysis of DIY musicians' forward-looking use of media I would like to suggest that music culture can indeed serve as a cultural barometer. In noting similarities between Attali's notion of "composition" and the DIY ethos, I would like to take James' analysis further by observing the importance specifically of the DIY ethos in music on the broader culture and ideology of neoliberalism. This of course problematises both Attali's faith in "composition" as a route out of consumer capitalism, as well as faith in the DIY ethos by underground music cultures as a route out of mass culture. Throughout my thesis, I seek to argue that DIY and underground music subcultures have been ahead of the curve in reorienting thinking around individualism, subcultural capital and authentic experiences that are essential to the culture of consumption under neoliberalism.

In my thesis I analyse Melbourne experimental and DIY music practices that emerged in the ensuing decades since the developments of neoliberalism. Thus assessing Attali's proposal of "composition" from our vantage point, his phrases such as "the right to compose one's life" sound quite like the advertising rhetoric employed by Apple Music, SoundCloud or other streaming music services that favour the individual consumer's agency in active participation or production. That is, the once radical

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fitness. In Attali's prediction, insurance companies will increasingly become gatekeepers for health cover based on individual's data statistics, a clear echoing of the regimes of self-surveillance offered by Foucault. Jacques Attali, *A Brief History of the Future*, trans. Jeremy Leggatt, 2nd ed. (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2011), 174-176.

<sup>88</sup> James, 139.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 140.

rhetoric of creativity has been coopted into the marketing language of consumer capitalism.

One characteristic of the culture of neoliberalism that began to develop after the events of my first case study was precisely this incorporation of leftist critiques of conformism. Attali's text was emerging in a climate of post-1968 France, and while there were regional concerns in France with the cultural imperialism of American mass culture, a growing sentiment since the 1960s against the conformism of mid-20th century mass culture was a global phenomenon. From American West Coast hippies to the Situationists, to Australian countercultural practitioners such as those of *Oz* magazine and Sydney experimental film collective *Ubu Films*, a central target for this critique was a culture of conservatism and consumerism hindering freedom of expression of the individual. Further to these cultural concerns, as mentioned earlier, a crisis of stagnant wages and inflation was gripping much of the world by the late 1970s. As recent writers such as Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello have observed, a rhetoric of individual "freedom" and identity fulfillment through "meaningful" work apparent in the discourse of neoliberalism has led to a conflation in some senses of left and right thinking.<sup>90</sup>

## Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined a theoretical context for the analyses of my case studies. In doing so, I have introduced key concepts that I will engage with throughout my thesis in order to examine DIY musicians' use of technological media. As we will see in my case studies, I argue that it is in DIY musicians' new ways of using media that these coming changes to political economy and also culture more broadly are first apparent. I have also discussed the significance of the notion of subcultural capital, as well as its relation to the equally important concept for my research of amateurism. Furthermore, throughout this chapter I have given an initial political context to my

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<sup>90</sup> Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London and New York: Verso, 2005), 75-76.



research in Melbourne as well as internationally. Thus I have provided a primary backdrop against which the events of my first case study, the Clifton Hill Community Music Centre, took place.

## Chapter Two

### The Clifton Hill Community Music Centre and its “Anyone Can Do It” Ethos

What experimental music and post-punk had in common [...] was that you no longer needed to be a musical expert or skilled in playing traditional instruments. *Anyone* could contribute to and make music. You just needed ideas and any means to produce a sound or make a gesture.

—David Chesworth.<sup>91</sup>

In 1979, in a dimly lit hall in the inner north suburb of Clifton Hill, Melbourne, experimental musician Ernie Althoff stands hunched over a cassette record and player. Along with Althoff’s voice, cassette players are the instrument for the evening, with which he creates a strange freeform electronic choir of recorded sounds. Althoff is standing among the scrum of an audience. Some listeners are seated facing his direction while others have their backs turned to him. All but one or two audience members are looking directly at him. It is likely—as was customary at these performance evenings—that following Althoff’s performance there was no applause; the evening simply continued.

At the same venue in 1981, David Chesworth performs his minimal synthesizer and post-punk inspired compositions, alongside Robert Goodge and Rainer Linz. They stand, appearing absorbed with their synthesizers elevated on wooden platforms. Gazing up as a spectator at the performers, they seem to be as if on a stage like a rock band. Or perhaps a synthesizer band, such as the German group Kraftwerk, or Japan’s Yellow Magic Orchestra, who were also making waves around the same time. From these two performances, one gains a sense of a music performance centre with

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<sup>91</sup> David Chesworth and Jon Dale, “Clifton Hill Community Music Centre and Early Music (Including Essendon Airport) David Chesworth Interviewed by Jon Dale,” in *Impresario: Paul Taylor, the Melbourne Years, 1981-1984*, eds. Nicholas Croggon and Helen Hughes (Melbourne: Surplus and Monash University Museum of Art, 2013), 217.

differing ideas on ways of music making and on the performer-audience relationship. Indeed, at the core of the venue hosting the events was a stated commitment to formlessness, as well as a general rule that “anyone can do it.”



Figure 1. David Chesworth (right) performs with Robert Goodge (left) and Rainer Linz (middle) at the Centre, 1981. Photographer unknown.

In 1976, Australian experimental music composer Ron Nagorcka with American expat composer Warren Burt founded the Clifton Hill Community Music Centre. Over the next few years until 1984, the Centre hosted performances including experimental music, post-punk groups, video works, Super 8 film screenings and experimental theatre.<sup>92</sup> The Centre had a lasting influence on artist-run or “do-it-yourself” (DIY) experimental music performances in Melbourne. The following year, the punk

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 216-220.

movement was launched into popular consciousness with the release of the Sex Pistols' album *Never Mind The Bollocks Here's the Sex Pistols*.<sup>93</sup> The seeds for this international movement were as much planted by Australian musicians as they were by more widely known artists in the UK and US. From early on in punk's development, international music press and record labels began to notice Sydney band Radio Birdman and Brisbane band The Saints (both founded in 1974) and positioned them in context with the nascent movement.<sup>94</sup> The latter self-released their first single (*I'm Stranded*) in September 1976,<sup>95</sup> pre-dating vinyl releases by UK punk bands the Sex Pistols and Buzzcocks, who in January 1977 produced what is more popularly credited with being the first self-released (or "do-it-yourself") punk record, *Spiral Scratch*.<sup>96</sup> The new "DIY ethos" of the global punk movement was well encapsulated by UK group The Desperate Bicycles, who in 1977 yelled on their self-released single a famous call to arms: "It was easy, it was cheap—go and do it!"<sup>97</sup> New and affordable ways of using media was a front-and-centre concern for punk's emergent DIY ethos.

Simultaneously while these initiatives were emerging, with their DIY ethos and encouragement of musicians' individualist freedom of expression as well as autonomy from the mainstream record industry, French economist and political theorist Jacques Attali published *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* (1977). The underlying hypothesis of *Noise* is that within the broader political economy, music is unique as a superstructure that has demonstrated a prophetic ability to predict coming changes in the economic base of society.<sup>98</sup> With his Marxist framework, Attali claims that each

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<sup>93</sup> Sex Pistols, *Never Mind the Bollocks, Here's the Sex Pistols*, Virgin VP2086, 1977, LP vinyl record.

<sup>94</sup> Walker, *Inner City Sound*, 11-16. Steve Bell, "How to Get Your Head around Eight Discs of Radio Birdman," *The Music*, October 10, 2014, accessed January 4, 2018, <http://themusic.com.au/news/all/2014/10/09/how-to-get-your-head-around-eight-discs-of-radio-birdman/>.

<sup>95</sup> The Saints, (*I'm Stranded*), Fatal Records, 1976, 7" vinyl record.

<sup>96</sup> Buzzcocks, *Spiral Scratch*, New Hormones ORG-1, 1977, 7" vinyl record.

<sup>97</sup> The Desperate Bicycles. *The Medium Was Tedium / Don't Back The Front*, Refill Records RR2, 1977, 7" vinyl record.

<sup>98</sup> "Superstructure" is a Marxist term for society's institutions and culture, which conventionally positions culture at some level as a symptom of the economic base (the base determines the superstructure, although the relationship may be reciprocal). Peter Singer, *Marx: A Very Short Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 48-54.

major shift in the production and consumption of music foreshadowed or announced changes to the broader economy. While this historicist claim is largely unproven in Attali's text, his final prediction for an at the time emergent paradigm shift, one which in Attali's analysis will signal broader cultural as well as economic changes in society, is of some pertinence to the questions of this thesis. Attali proposes a paradigm shift towards "composition," which he understands as a merging together of production and consumption. In "composition" we can observe a similarity to the DIY ethos of independent music practices in my thesis, beginning in this chapter with the Clifton Hill Community Music Centre's "anyone can do it" attitude,<sup>99</sup> as well as its crossovers with the young Australian punk movement. "Composition" is a useful concept in its resemblance at once to the use of media by DIY musicians in my thesis, as well as its relation to neoliberal labour, as noted in Chapter One. As discussed, the relationship between the DIY ethos in music and the emergence of neoliberalism is a thread that I will analyse throughout my thesis.

This chapter begins in the late 1970s in Melbourne—at the roots of this paradigm shift in music consumption and production, where the creative expression and agency of the music listener took new precedence. Shortly after the birth of the Australian punk DIY movement, and a good fifteen years before the emergence of the World Wide Web led to our present day digitally networked society, the Clifton Hill Community Music Centre emerged with a strong "anyone can do it" ethos applied across experimental music, contemporary art and post-punk music practices. In this chapter I establish the Centre as a site in which the foundational motivations for what follows in my thesis were initially experimented with in Melbourne. These were explored through the Centre's DIY ethos, praise of amateurism and development of new ways of using media and technologies for music-making.

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<sup>99</sup> David Chesworth, "The Clifton Hill Community Music Centre," in *New Music 1978-1979*, eds. Philip Brophy and David Chesworth (Clifton Hill: Clifton Hill Community Music Centre, 1980), unnumbered.

## The history of the Clifton Hill Community Music Centre

Clifton Hill Community Music Centre was founded at a point of time in which various experimental music traditions had already established practices in which a level of musical skill or proficiency was not a central concern. These included those that directly followed American experimental composer John Cage's influence, as well as performers associated with Fluxus.<sup>100</sup> At the same time, the punk movement that was emerging internationally, while having differing ideological concerns to the avant-garde musicians just mentioned, also held as a central tenet in their work the privileging of access and participation regardless of musical skill. Former coordinator of the Centre David Chesworth has discussed this point, noting:

The aesthetic of you know 'just do it,' which was very punk, was very much the same aesthetic as the sort of post [John] Cagean aesthetic [...] the two just coincided at that point. The whole punk thing, 'just do it' and all that, it was *already there*, in place [...] in a sense the two reinforced each other.<sup>101</sup>

Experimental music practices in this post-Cagean tradition found presentation opportunities within institutional environments in Australia in the 1970s, such as at universities. In particular, the founding of La Trobe University's music department in 1975 was significant, where the Centre's co-founder Warren Burt became a faculty member, and which did away with the conservatorium-styled and classically oriented departments of Australian tertiary music institutions up until this point.<sup>102</sup> Prior to this, Centre co-founder Ron Nagorcka had in the early 1970s developed a number of initiatives such as a concert series entitled the New Improvisers Action Group for Gnostic and Rhythmic Awareness (NIAGGRA), held at La Mama Theatre in Carlton between 1972-74. Nagorcka also co-founded the New Music Centre (NMC), being a

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<sup>100</sup> Chesworth, interview by Davis.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Fox, 31.

“studio and workshop space for musicians working in a contemporary or electronic vein ... as well as a library and reference centre.”<sup>103</sup> The NMC, which had aligned itself with the Melbourne branch of the International Society for Contemporary Music (ISCM) eventually dissolved due to organisational issues and founders including Nagorcka travelling overseas.<sup>104</sup> Nagorcka had helped run a performance series entitled Atomic Cafe with Warren Burt overseas at the University of California at San Diego.<sup>105</sup> The experience of these prior presentation initiatives led Nagorcka and Burt to define a set of principles for a performance series that would become the Clifton Hill Community Music Centre.

In the mid-1970s, a red brick building on Page Street in the inner city then working class Melbourne suburb of Clifton Hill was vacated by its tenants, the British organ building firm Hill, Norman and Beard. Since the company first occupied the building in 1927, the Clifton Hill organ factory site had built prominent instruments including Melbourne’s historic 1929 Town Hall Grand Organ. The Town Hall Grand Organ was the largest concert organ built during the interwar period in the British Empire. When Hill, Norman and Beard vacated the site in 1974, the local council along with the nearby Gold Street Primary School council, staff and parents petitioned the State Government’s Education Department to purchase the building. The petition was successful and the former organ factory became home to a community centre, hosting local theatre, music and recreational groups.<sup>106</sup>

In a sense, the purchase of the site by the Education Department was indicative of the climate in Australia and Melbourne’s home state of Victoria during the 1970s of the support for community services and the arts. The Organ Factory became a community centre in the same year that the Federal Labor Government led by Gough Whitlam had

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>105</sup> Ernie Althoff, “The Clifton Hill Community Music Centre 1976 - 1983,” *NMA Magazine*, no. 7 (1989): 39.

<sup>106</sup> Collingwood Historical Society Inc, “The Organ Factory,” Collingwood Historical Society Inc, accessed January 8, 2018, <http://collingwoodhs.org.au/resources/collingwood-history-plaques-project/the-organ-factory/>.

been elected. Whitlam was a renowned social progressive whose support for education was discussed earlier. By the time the Clifton Hill Community Centre was founded in 1976, Whitlam had been dismissed, however his government's effects on the Australian arts and social climate was felt in years to come. Furthermore, the Victorian State Government under the helm of Premier Rupert "Dick" Hamer, elected in 1972, helped Melbourne develop as an increasingly socially progressive city that was supportive of the arts. Although Hamer's was a government of the traditionally more conservative centre-right Liberal Party, the policies of his leadership until 1981 have been compared to those of Whitlam's. The Hamer Government's legacy included environmental protection policies and an increase in green spaces, purchasing public buildings such as the Organ Factory, along with socially progressive policies such as decriminalising homosexuality and Victoria's Equal Opportunity Act. Hamer was also a strong supporter of arts funding in government, himself holding the position of arts minister.<sup>107</sup>

In 1976 the Organ Factory was used by leftist experimental theatre group New Theatre, as well as community music groups such as a traditional Greek music ensemble.<sup>108</sup> At this time a space became available to host the weekly Clifton Hill Community Music Centre events. The founding principles of the Centre were defined in order to deter any predominant ideological or stylistic program, or at least to attempt to remove any academic or institutionally defined notion of what was acceptable with regard to the performances, and any hierarchy with regard to who could perform. As experimental musician and regular Centre performer Ernie Althoff notes in his overview of the Centre's history for *NMA Magazine*, Nagorcka had "witnessed the bitter infighting and factionalism that had plagued the Melbourne branch of the ISCM (International Society for Contemporary Music) and the New Music Centre in the

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<sup>107</sup> Judith Brett, "How Hamer Made It Happen," *Inside Story*, October 27, 2014, accessed January 8, 2018, <http://insidestory.org.au/how-hamer-made-it-happen/>.

<sup>108</sup> Chesworth, interview by Davis.

Angela Hillel, *Against the Stream: Melbourne New Theatre 1936-1986* (Clifton Hill: New Theatre Melbourne, 1986), 39.



early 1970s,”<sup>109</sup> and subsequently this was one of the concerns of the Centre’s foundation in reducing organisational bureaucracy.

The first founding principle of the Centre was that no money was to be charged for entrance from the audience, and in turn, that no money be paid to the performers. There was no equipment supplied to performers and marketing and promotion was minimal. Ernie Althoff states that the “removal of economics from the musical equation was of supreme importance in setting up a space with a truly alternative set of values.”<sup>110</sup> “Alternative,” Althoff seems to be implying, to the academically accepted values of contemporary music institutions at the time. However, the newly established La Trobe University music as well as film theory courses remained a strong influence on performers at the Centre and its younger generation in particular.

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<sup>109</sup> Ernie Althoff, 39.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

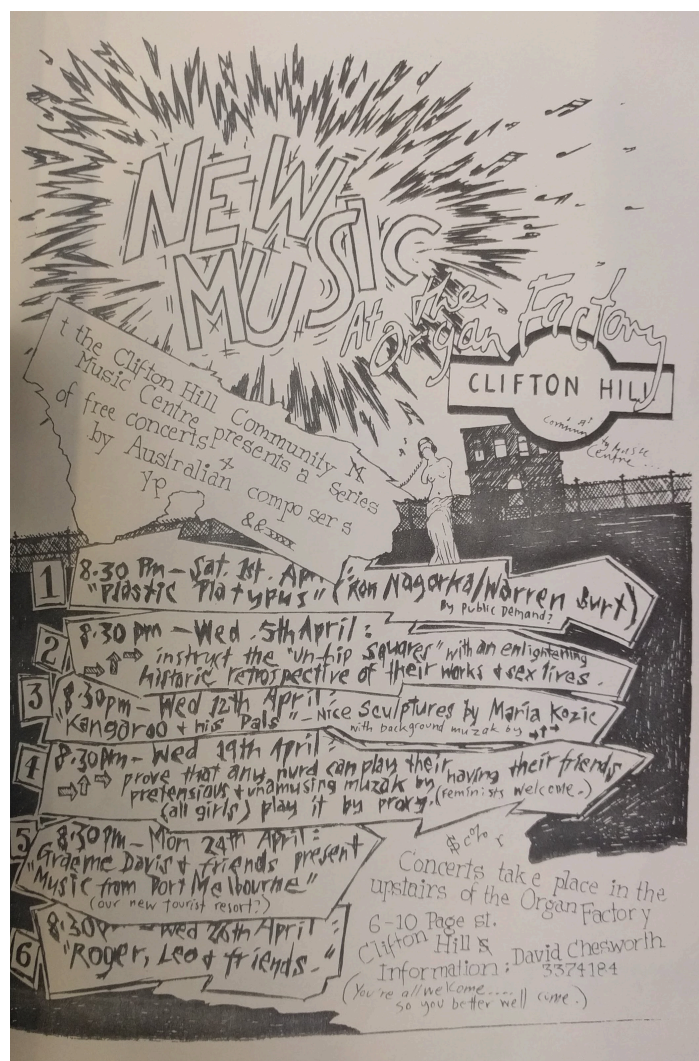


Figure 2. Clifton Hill Community Music Centre program poster. Designed by Philip Brophy.

The second founding principle was that of open access to the space and of no restrictions regarding what types of performances could take place. Thirdly, the Centre was run “anarchically” or without hierarchy in its organisation and direction. Specifically, an elected coordinator arranged performance times, opened and closed the building and took care of minimal publicity. Althoff states: “When that person tired of the coordinator's job, it was passed on to another. In this way, a sense of continuity and adapting to changing needs was built into the Centre's operation.”<sup>111</sup> Ron Nagorcka was the first coordinator of the Centre, followed by Warren Burt, and

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

then from 1978 David Chesworth would become the Centre's longest running coordinator until 1982.<sup>112</sup>

There was a noted policy of minimal marketing for the Centre's performances. This was supposedly to ensure that the coordinator's directive role at the Centre was minimal, as well as a result of the Centre's "no-finance" principle.<sup>113</sup> This minimal marketing did however contribute to something of a scene developing around the Centre. Despite the open door policy, it seems that the Centre was mainly accessed by a relatively small group of regulars.

It must be noted that performers at the Centre were overwhelmingly male,<sup>114</sup> with some exceptions including Julie Anderson, Jane O'Brien and ↪ ↗ ↘ (pronounced with three clicks of the tongue and sometimes written as Tsk Tsk Tsk) members Jayne Stevenson and Maria Kozic.<sup>115</sup> This reflects a male dominance in terms of representation within both independent and commercial music scenes in Australia that continues throughout the timeline of this thesis until the present day, an issue that I examine further in Chapter Five. However, this is despite the 1970s being a significant decade for feminism in Australia. Several initiatives were taken throughout the 1970s, particularly within the visual arts in Australia and Melbourne, to raise the profile and visibility of female artists. The United Nations declared 1975 declared as International Women's Year. In the year prior the Women's Art Movement was set up in Australia with groups in cities across the country, providing advocacy, promotion and exposing discrimination against female artists. The Women's Art Register also began in Melbourne in 1975, documenting and promoting the work of female Australian artists,

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> This point is demonstrated somewhat by Figure 3.

<sup>115</sup> Philip Brophy and David Chesworth, "Concertography," in *New Music 1978-1979*, eds., Philip Brophy and David Chesworth (Clifton Hill: Clifton Hill Community Music Centre, 1980), unnumbered.

Philip Brophy, ed., *Made by ↪ ↗ ↘* (Northcote: ↪ ↗ ↘, 1983), 86.

an initiative that still exists at the time of my writing.<sup>116</sup> *Lip*, an art journal based in Melbourne that reviewed the work of female artists from a feminist perspective was established in 1976.<sup>117</sup> Nonetheless, co-founder of *Lip* journal, writer and curator Janine Burke has commented that a “shift in politics to the right” occurred in the Melbourne art world at the beginning of the 1980s, affecting the place of feminism in these communities. Burke noted that this occurred

with the decade of Margaret Thatcher. It was massive and it filtered down. Prior to that, the art world had prided itself on its raffish, down-at-heel style, like, ‘Who cares about how you look?’ Then everybody was wearing black and younger folk were in Comme des Garçons and boasting about how much it cost. [...] So, for the feminists, from beating our breasts and being in May Day marches, suddenly this was just seen as ‘Oh, so terribly old fashioned’.<sup>118</sup>

This is a sentiment that is reflective of the contentious term “post-feminism,” popularised globally in 1982 by an article in the *New York Times Magazine* article “Voices from the Post-Feminist Generation” by Susan Bolotin.<sup>119</sup> Burke has reflected on her late friend Paul Taylor, a writer, curator and regular at the Centre, and his connection to these new criticisms levelled at the 1970s feminist art movement. Although Burke notes that many of Taylor’s friends were “staunch feminists,” herself included,<sup>120</sup> antagonism existed between Taylor and some of those affiliated with *Lip*. This played out particularly with a critical article Taylor wrote for the *Meanjin* literary

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<sup>116</sup> Tamara Winikoff, “Women in Australian Art,” *NAVA*, March 23, 2016, accessed January 9, 2018, <https://visualarts.net.au/news-opinion/2016/women-australian-art/>.

<sup>117</sup> Janine Burke and Helen Hughes, “‘He Was the Devil Incarnate’: Paul Taylor, *Lip* and Art & Text,” in *Impresario: Paul Taylor, the Melbourne Years, 1981-1984*, eds. Nicholas Croggon and Helen Hughes (Melbourne: Surplus and Monash University Museum of Art, 2013), 226.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 229.

<sup>119</sup> Stacy Gillis, Gillian Howie, and Rebecca Munford, “Introduction,” in *Third Wave Feminism: A Critical Exploration*, eds. Stacy Gillis, Gillian Howie, and Rebecca Munford, 2nd ed. (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), xxvi.

<sup>120</sup> Burke and Hughes, 230.

journal in 1981, criticising *Lip* for a supposedly uncritical stance taken towards female artists, in not wishing to undermine its feminist cause.<sup>121</sup>

Certain individuals and groups had a consistent presence throughout the Centre's history, including Althoff, as well as his group with Nagorcka and Graeme Davies called I.D.A (or Institute for Dronal Anarchy), long-time Centre coordinator Chesworth and his “Dave and Phil Duo,” with another regular, Philip Brophy, whose group → ↑ → were described as “stalwarts” of the Centre.<sup>122</sup>

In 1980 David Chesworth and Philip Brophy began the publication of *New Music* magazine, which continued for four issues after an initial retrospective 1978-1979 issue. The magazine's concept was to invite any audience member of a Centre performance, regardless of background, to write a review of their experience. The performers would in turn read the review, and respond in an interview with the reviewer. Interviews would be transcribed and published in *New Music* along with the original concert reviews.<sup>123</sup>

Rent of the Centre's space was \$100 per year initially; a later rent rise to \$300 led first to a donations jar being placed in the Centre foyer, and in 1982 finally to the first principle of the Centre needing to be compromised with \$1 entry fees requested.<sup>124</sup> In 1984 following an organisational meeting that was attended by Robert Goodge, Andrew Preston, Rainer Linz and Althoff (this meeting's representation reflected the Centre's male-dominated community), it was decided that due to dwindling participation in the Centre and the risk that it could stray from its initial founding principles, that the Centre should wind up its operations. Ironically, this decision came in the wake of a successful application to the Victorian Ministry for the Arts (the first

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 230-232.

<sup>122</sup> Althoff, 41.

<sup>123</sup> Philip Brophy and David Chesworth, “Editorial,” in *New Music 1978-1979*, eds., Philip Brophy and David Chesworth (Clifton Hill: Clifton Hill Community Music Centre, 1980), unnumbered.

<sup>124</sup> Althoff, 39.

funding assistance the Centre had received) and subsequently the funds were returned to the Ministry.<sup>125</sup>



Figure 3. Group portrait of Centre regulars, 1980. Pictured left to right: Philip Brophy, Robert Goodge, David Chesworth, Robin Teese, Paul Turner, Gordon Harvey, Paul Schulz, Chris Wyatt, Mark Pollard, Ian Russell, Jane Crawford, John Crawford, Graeme Davies.  
Photographer unknown.

### **“Amateurism” and the aesthetic concerns of performances at the Centre**

Performances at the Centre were aesthetically varied. From works inspired by the likes of American avant-garde composers such as John Cage and Alvin Lucier, to post-punk affiliated bands, Super-8 screenings and performance art.<sup>126</sup> Prominent Centre regular Althoff performed on a number of occasions solo as well as among the ensemble I.D.A. A recording of part of I.D.A’s piece “Seven Rare Dreamings,” which was performed at the Centre on 27 August 1980 as a duo of Nagorcka and Althoff, can be

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>126</sup> Chesworth and Dale, 219-222.



heard on the *One Stop Shopping* cassette compilation, released by Sydney record label Terse Tapes in 1981.<sup>127</sup> In “Seven Rare Dreamings,” the duo performs with a didgeridoo, computer-generated drones, a crashing percussive instrument as well as performative and monotone spoken-word readings, the text of which is not clearly made out in the recording. Of the piece, Nagorcka claimed that he wished to compose a work that “seriously treats the didgeridoo [*sic*] – that doesn’t just treat it as a joke or as an object of [curiosity].” Furthermore, one that was interested in sonically making disparate cultural phenomena, computer-generated tones and a didgeridoo, “work together.”<sup>128</sup> This comment could be considered to be a questioning of the Euro-centric framing of avant-garde music. While interviewing Althoff and Nagorcka that year for *New Music* magazine, concert attendee Paul Turner alluded to this Euro-centric framing. Turner contrasted I.D.A.’s performance to that of Australian composer George Dreyfus’ prior use of the didgeridoo with a wind quintet, which saw “Western music being the hero or the main protagonist.”<sup>129</sup>

Cassette recorders were adopted as instruments by some of the performers, such as Althoff, who used them in pieces such as “Accentuate the Positive” in 1979.<sup>130</sup> Graeme Davies also explored the use of cassette tapes. His piece “Cassettes Are Driving Me Crazy,” in which a collage of droning vocal recordings can be heard, was recorded live and featured on the *One Stop Shopping* compilation. In a 1980 interview for *New Music* magazine, Davies noted:

I just got into them [cassette recorders] because I didn’t know anything about music and I saw these two guys playing cassette recorders. I can play a cassette but I can’t play a musical instrument. Accessibility is the thing—I realized immediately I could do it too.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Various, *One Stop Shopping*, Terse Tapes TRS009, 1981, three cassette compilation.

<sup>128</sup> Ernie Althoff, Ron Nagorcka, and Paul Turner, “Seven Rare Dreamings,” in *New Music*, no. 3 (1980): 16.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>130</sup> Brophy and Chesworth, unnumbered.

<sup>131</sup> Ernie Althoff, Graeme Davies, and Ralph Traviato, “I.D.A.” in *New Music*, no. 1 (1980): 43.

This use of cassette media speaks to a number of key concepts in this chapter. For one, there is the fact that musicians have developed new ways of using media in technology that runs counter to their intended purposes. Davies' discussion of using a cassette recorder unconventionally as an instrument can be likened to the way sound art scholar Caleb Kelly considers how experimental musicians have developed new ways of using media, in what he terms "cracked media." By the term "crack," Kelly refers to interventions into the physical properties of the media that rewrite its potential uses. For instance, Kelly provides the example of Cage's use of pipe cleaners or toothpicks to replace needles in record player cartridge heads, greatly altering the sound produced by the record player.<sup>132</sup> Kelly likens the practices of "cracked media" to the "joyful discovery" that French Jesuit and scholar Michel de Certeau ascribed in his 1980 book *The Practice of Everyday Life* (translated to English in 1984) to what he calls "tactics," or adapting to one's social environment in everyday life not by a greater structural change, but by "making do."<sup>133</sup> Thinking of "cracked media" as Kelly does through the tactics of de Certeau, Davies' use of the cassette recorder here is a strong example of the joy derived by DIY musicians in "making do" with their available musical resources.<sup>134</sup> Further to this, there is an underlying sense of the coming significance of cassette media, with its foreshadowing of today's user-generated content online. It is my contention that cassette media offered the beginning of a shift in the culture of consumption towards an increasing focus on the platform. I argue that this trend was led as much by musicians' adoption of cassette media and their development of new distribution networks, as by the technology developers themselves.

Finally, in Davies' comment above, we see an embrace of amateurism that was a crucial interest for many participants of the Centre, as well as the generation of Australian postmodernists that I discuss in this chapter. An embrace of the amateur is a

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<sup>132</sup> Caleb Kelly, *Cracked Media: The Sound of Malfunction* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2009), 292.

<sup>133</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven F. Rendall (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1984), 29-39.

<sup>134</sup> Kelly, 287.



central characteristic of the DIY ethos, in its establishment of the possibility for participation by would-be musicians. As film theorist and Clifton Hill regular Adrian Martin commented in 1988, “The lessons and dreams of amateurism seem very lost to us today, in these upwardly mobile, normalised times.”<sup>135</sup> In discussing “upwardly mobile” times, Martin appears to be alluding to the culture of the late 1980s as aspirational and one that emphasised professionalisation, as well as the potential for any individual through an embrace of the amateur to have their “dreams come true.” These are cultural characteristics that must be considered in relation to the onset of neoliberalism, occurring in the ensuing years after the events of this chapter.

Essendon Airport (initially formed as a duo with David Chesworth and Robert Goodge, later incorporating other members) often explored a mix of musical Minimalism together with the experimental guitar playing of post-punk and New Wave music. The recording available on the aforementioned *One Stop Shopping* compilation recorded at the Centre, “Guitar Duet,” is indicative of this, as is their record *Sonic Investigations of the Trivial* (1979). Essendon Airport’s 7” record with vocalist Anne Cessna, *Talking To Cleopatra/Lost In Madagascar* (1980) presented more conventional song structures with two New Wave synth-punk pieces featuring vocals. The band released recordings on David Chesworth and Philip Brophy’s own label Innocent Records.<sup>136</sup> These recordings are indicative of these Melbourne postmodernist musicians’ stated desires in exploring the language of mainstream pop music, as well as New Wave tendencies that were emerging in Melbourne as well as internationally.

### **The “birthplace” of cultural postmodernism in Melbourne**

In considering the Centre retrospectively, Chesworth has discussed two distinguishable groupings of artistic concerns that came together, being those of the generation of

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<sup>135</sup> Martin, “Before and After *Art & Text*,” 109.

<sup>136</sup> Chapter Music, “Palimpsest,” Chapter Music Bandcamp, accessed December 12, 2017, <https://chaptermusic.bandcamp.com/album/palimpsest>.

performers who were initially involved in founding the Centre (generally in their thirties at the time) and were concerned with “post-Cagean” principles, and the younger artists (generally in their early twenties) exploring postmodernism, post-punk and interrogating mainstream music culture.<sup>137</sup> The two groups came together through a foregrounding of inclusiveness that was a core principle of the Centre. It can be observed that even while there was at times antagonism in the conflicting creative concerns of these two groups, taken broadly, common threads exist through both groups’ anti-institutional “DIY ethos,” their aversions to hierarchical organisational structures, as well as their attitude against perceived institutional stifling of individual freedoms.

For the generation of performers that included the Centre’s co-founders Warren Burt and Ron Nagorcka, these concerns around experimenting against hierarchical organisational structures and anti-institutionalism were brought from already established experimental music communities in the US and the influence of John Cage.<sup>138</sup> These concerns were also in some way reflective of countercultural strains that appeared globally since the 1960s.<sup>139</sup> While the countercultural elements of 1960s and 1970s experimental music cultures from the US were in a different context within the Australian cultural environment, the conceptual concerns of the slightly older generation of the Centre was undeniably one that was imported from similar practices in the US and Europe, rather than being distinctly Australian practices. Further to this, their interests were cultural and musical, not so much direct responses to a particular political or economic climate. However despite the comparatively forward-thinking nature of the recently formed La Trobe music department to prior music education in the country, the cultural climate with regard to music in Australian educational institutions was still largely conservatorium styled and classically oriented,<sup>140</sup> giving

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<sup>137</sup> Chesworth, interview by Davis.

<sup>138</sup> Fox, 25.

<sup>139</sup> Fred Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), 3-5.

<sup>140</sup> Fox, 31.

credence to the need for a space such as the Centre for such practices to have an airing.<sup>141</sup>

For the younger generation of performers, including Chesworth and his group Essendon Airport, as well as Philip Brophy (and  $\rightarrow \uparrow \rightarrow$ ), a primary set of concerns included a DIY ethos and an “anyone can do it” attitude that had been inspired by the punk movement. This is despite, as Chesworth has noted, the fact that this attitude was “already there” after the influences of experimental music from the 1960s.<sup>142</sup> There was a degree of ideological antagonism between some of the postmodernist musicians and those who have been described by Chesworth as having more of a “hippie” ethos. Chesworth noted that:

They’d [the older performers] be a bit shocked by these things that they were trying to in a sense get away from—the whole sort of hierarchy of how people are entertained, or how the art is kind of delivery—they were breaking it down and here it was being reinstated and criticised and picked apart.<sup>143</sup>

Chesworth refers to the “hippie” breaking down of performance norms such as the hierarchy between the performer and audience. Performances at the Centre would often emphasise casually sitting among the performers without a stage. A tradition also developed in which there would be no applause following performances, contrary to the norms of performance etiquette.<sup>144</sup> However the younger generation of performers, particularly Philip Brophy and  $\rightarrow \uparrow \rightarrow$  began to reintroduce these tropes and hierarchies inherent in mainstream and institutional music cultures.  $\rightarrow \uparrow \rightarrow$  revived the performer-audience relationship as it was played out in popular disco and rock music. As Chesworth states: “there was a whole feeling at the time, from our generation, that

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<sup>141</sup> Chesworth, interview by Davis.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

we were wanting to dismantle everything around us [even including the Centre's tendency to work against performance norms].”<sup>145</sup>

By the late 1970s the writing of French post-structuralist philosophers had selectively reached Australia in English translations, and had begun influencing young artists including those at the Centre. Chesworth noted that the influence of French theory diffused through the community associated with the Centre primarily from La Trobe University's film course, which he and others at the Centre took classes in.<sup>146</sup> During this period, Melbourne journal *Art & Text* was crucial in the development of a dialogue around cultural postmodernism and post-structuralism in Australia. Founded in 1981 and edited by Paul Taylor, *Art & Text* published writing on contemporary Australian art in dialogue with the theories of some of these aforementioned French post-structuralist thinkers. In particular, Taylor was influenced by the semiology of cultural “myths” defined by literary theorist and philosopher Roland Barthes. Taylor was himself a regular attendee at the Centre, and the journal provided an outlet for the theoretical concerns of some of its performers.<sup>147</sup> Chesworth has commented that Taylor in a sense “started the process of legitimisation” of the ideas that the younger generation of artists at the Centre, and that “all of a sudden this output of people [...] he introduced it back into discourse.”<sup>148</sup> Or specifically, *Art & Text* provided an outlet for critical discussion on the goings on of the Centre that up until that point had only received written coverage in less critically engaged music press.<sup>149</sup> An interest in semiotics via Barthes found its way into the conceptual concerns of other artists performing at the Centre. These included Philip Brophy, who held an interest in the work of sociologist and cultural studies theorist Dick Hebdige and his 1979 book *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, with its particular application of Barthes' writing into a semiotic reading of subcultural style. Brophy published a review of *Subculture*:

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Adrian Martin, “The Return Waltz,” in *Impresario: Paul Taylor, the Melbourne Years, 1981-1984*, eds. Nicholas Croggon and Helen Hughes (Melbourne: Surplus and Monash University Museum of Art, 2013), 9.

<sup>148</sup> Chesworth, interview by Davis.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

*The Meaning of Style in Art & Text*<sup>150</sup> and he can be heard on an issue of the *Fast Forward* cassette magazine outlining the concept of subcultures.<sup>151</sup> Notably too, film theorist Adrian Martin formed a group that was to perform at the Centre, The Connotations—whose title was no doubt an allusion to Barthes’ concept of a “connotation” as it pertains to semiotics.<sup>152</sup>

Inevitably, the writing of French post-structuralist philosophers was received with a degree of political remove from its post-1968 French context for the young Melbourne artists. Melbourne artists, in fact, enjoyed a rather different economic and cultural context in the 1970s. They read these texts in a climate after Whitlam’s increases to arts funding, which was in turn maintained under the subsequent Liberal-Country Party Coalition Government led by Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser. Under the Whitlam Government, the Australia Council for arts funding was formally established in 1973, merging several existing funding boards. Whitlam favoured a single council for “streamlined administration providing independence from political pressures and safeguards against centralised and authoritarian tendencies.”<sup>153</sup> The newly established Council received a significant increase in funding from the previous bodies from which it was formed. Funding was nearly doubled to \$14 million in the Whitlam Government’s 1973-1974 budget, with a further 50% increase in the 1974-1975 budget. The successive Fraser Government, while making changes to increase efficiency and streamline the administration of the Council, did not reduce the level of funding being distributed in grants.<sup>154</sup> This context—a period of national investment in culture that also saw the rise of a burgeoning Australian film industry—made for a period of creative freedom with decreased economic pressure. This was thanks to welfare and the availability of funding and space, as well as free tertiary education

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<sup>150</sup> Philip Brophy, “*Subculture: The Meaning of Style* by Dick Hebdige (Book Review),” *Art & Text*, no. 1 (1981): 69-74.

<sup>151</sup> Philip Brophy, “And You Thought It was Just Plain Good Fun! Recorded Melbourne 27 September ’82 by Greta Moon,” *Fast Forward*, no. 13 (1982).

<sup>152</sup> Chesworth and Dale, 220.

<sup>153</sup> Australian Government Department of the Parliamentary Library, 7.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-12.

providing greater access to forward-thinking educational programs, such as La Trobe's experimental music programs and cinema studies units. Rather than approaching newly translated French post-structuralist texts in the context of their antagonistic post-1968 political context, readings evident through *Art & Text* as well as Clifton Hill performances demonstrate rather a somewhat depoliticised interest in language, genre and style. Furthermore, they demonstrate a postmodernist interest in challenging the Modernist push for breaks from tradition, favouring the quotation of past modes of performance.

The young Australian "New Wave" or "Popists," to draw from terms applied to Australian postmodernism by Taylor,<sup>155</sup> were among a wave of artists who saw in colonial white Australia's elusive cultural identity fertile ground for a postmodern questioning of identity and the local. As Rex Butler has written in relation to the generation of young Australian artists engaging with appropriation: "Australia might have no identity of its own or its identity might depend on that of other countries, but it embodies this condition *more than any of those other countries*."<sup>156</sup>

The activities of the scene associated with Taylor culminated in a major exhibition curated by Taylor at the National Gallery of Victoria in 1982 entitled *POPISM*, featuring the work of some of those associated with the Clifton Hill Community Music Centre including David Chesworth, Philip Brophy (in  $\rightarrow \uparrow \rightarrow$ ) and Maria Kozic.<sup>157</sup> Of the exhibition Butler notes *POPISM*

sparked the first public debate in Australia of the theories of structuralism and semiotics imported from France and their inversion of the commonly-held tenets that a work of art must be original, that the artist expresses himself through his

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<sup>155</sup> Butler, 16-17.

Martin, "Before and After *Art & Text*," 111.

<sup>156</sup> Butler, 17.

<sup>157</sup> Paul Taylor, "Catalogue Essay from *Popism*," in *What Is Appropriation?: An Anthology of Writings on Australian Art in the 1980s and 1990s*, 2nd ed., ed. Rex Butler (Brisbane: IMA Publishing, 2004), 84.

work, that the aim of the interpretation of a work of art is to recreate the original intention of the artist who made it.<sup>158</sup>

While *POPISM* presented these new tendencies in Australian art to a wide audience, it was at the Centre where they were initially formed. As Chesworth has argued, the Centre can thus be understood as the “birthplace of postmodernism in Melbourne,” or at least one of its birthplaces.<sup>159</sup>

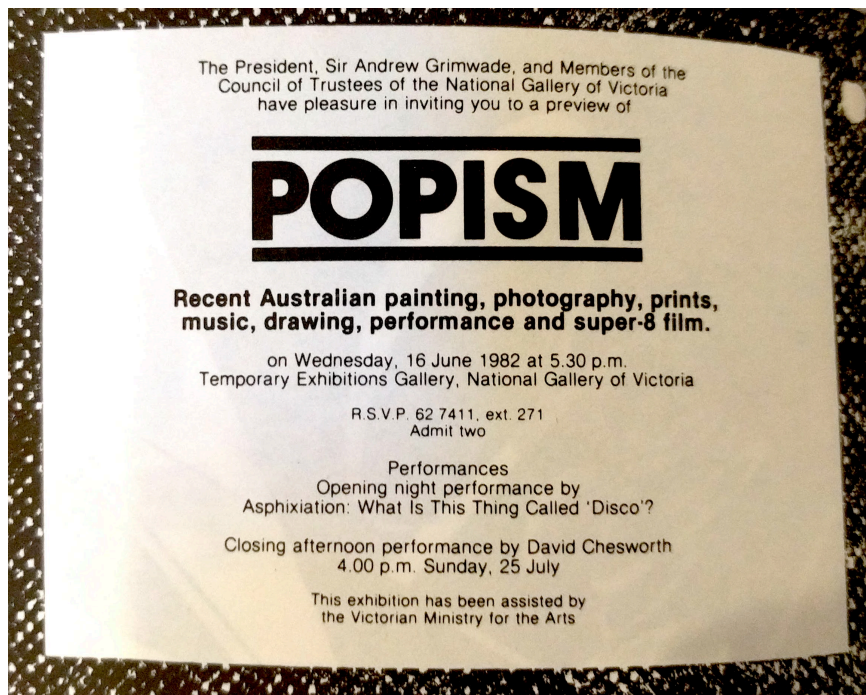


Figure 4. *POPISM* exhibition preview invitation, National Gallery of Victoria, 1982.

Despite the aforementioned disagreements across generations of performers, an anti-institutional sentiment in a sense unified the participants at the Centre. Be it an antagonism towards the Modernist experimental or avant-garde music institutions (sentiments carried on from the post-Cagean performers), or (for the post-punk performers) the largely homogenous mainstream of the Australian pub rock scene. Chesworth affirms this sentiment with the following comment:

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<sup>158</sup> Butler, 18.

<sup>159</sup> Chesworth, interview by Davis.

We'd had a gut full of the increasing 'empty' push for novel innovation within modernity whose purpose was to replace whatever came before. What we did for ourselves was to challenge what I think we saw as modernism's and capitalism's grip on high and popular culture [...] including the music industry [...] We responded by *working* at making music and films and performances that involved the pulling apart and examining of these processes (which French theory, punk and west coast American counter-culture [...] were also doing. I think you'll find this manifesting at the time in the work of Rainer Linz, [→ ↑ →], Andrew Preston, Essendon Airport, The Connotations (Adrian Martin), myself but also expressed in a different way by Ron Nagorcka, Chris Mann, Warren Burt and others.<sup>160</sup>

In Taylor's essay "Australian New Wave and the Second Degree," published in the first issue of *Art & Text* in 1981, he discusses the use of stylistic quotation by a "New Wave" of young Australian artists. The artists he mentions (Jenny Watson, John Lethbridge, Howard Arkley and the band → ↑ →) borrowed from both late Modernist traditions as well as popular culture. For Taylor, the quotation of Modernist styles served to repurpose these styles, displacing their original attempts at "pure" meanings and "Modernist optimism and faith in a new harmony of constructive art,"<sup>161</sup> in order to create a new plurality of meaning and interpretation in their "second degree" quotation, a term Taylor uses after Barthes. This is reflective of what philosopher Jean-François Lyotard termed as an end of Modernism's "grand narratives" in his 1979 book *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, and would become a central tenet of postmodernism as a cultural movement in art and architecture.<sup>162</sup> Taylor's emphasis on style draws greatly from the readings of postwar subcultures by Hebdige. Lacking the specific British cultural context of class that grounded Hebdige's text however, Taylor's reading approached style in a more light-hearted and somewhat

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<sup>160</sup> David Chesworth, e-mail message to Jared Davis, March 10, 2016.

<sup>161</sup> Taylor, "Australian New Wave and the 'Second Degree'." 162.

<sup>162</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 37-41.



depoliticised way,<sup>163</sup> one which for Taylor seems to focus most prominently on the pleasure of linguistic play and attempts at the creation of new meaning from this playfulness.

Another group to regularly perform at the Centre,  $\rightarrow \uparrow \rightarrow$ , was a musical project formed in 1977 by Philip Brophy featuring numerous participants including most consistently Maria Kozic, Leigh Parkhill, Jayne Stevenson and Ralph Traviato.<sup>164</sup>

Until the project's end in 1986,  $\rightarrow \uparrow \rightarrow$  demonstrated an interdisciplinary practice that spanned live musical performance, experimental films, exhibitions, records on Brophy and Chesworth's independent label, Innocent, and printed texts. The nature of the project meant that  $\rightarrow \uparrow \rightarrow$  created work for a range of presentation contexts, each with their own individual modes of reception and audience. These included the Jump Club post-punk venue on Smith Street in Collingwood, as well as art spaces such as George Paton Gallery, the National Gallery of Victoria and the Centre.<sup>165</sup>

The variety of modes in which  $\rightarrow \uparrow \rightarrow$  was read is something that was considered, quite consciously, by the group leader Philip Brophy.  $\rightarrow \uparrow \rightarrow$  could perhaps be described as a "concept" band, or a group thinking conceptually about what it is to be a punk band, or a pop band, or a disco band; all of these hats they at times wore and experimented with. At some times, the group performed music in the tradition of New York Minimalism, an avant-garde music style that emerged in the 1960s, with notable proponents being Steve Reich and Philip Glass.<sup>166</sup> Another noteworthy performative mode of  $\rightarrow \uparrow \rightarrow$  was their project "Asphixiation: What Is This Thing Called Disco?" in which the group took on the persona of a fictional disco band, setting up an

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<sup>163</sup> Taylor does however address sexual identity politics in considering style among gay men. Taylor, "Australian New Wave and the 'Second Degree'," 159.

<sup>164</sup> Brophy, *Made by  $\rightarrow \uparrow \rightarrow$* , 86.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>166</sup> Nyman, 119.

exhibition at the George Paton Gallery in July 1980,<sup>167</sup> holding performances at various venues of original disco music, and releasing a record on Innocent.<sup>168</sup> The George Paton Gallery exhibition consisted of paintings featuring images of fashion models appropriated from issues of *L'Uomo Vogue* and *L'Officiel*, fluorescent lighting mounted at various angles, suspended aluminium frames, as well as musical instruments placed on plinths (with vocals being accounted for by a bottle of Listerine).<sup>169</sup> Playing in the gallery were synthesized as well as prerecorded ambient sounds. For scheduled “live” performances Brophy assembled a fake band to mime along to the recordings, visibly playing from a reel-to-reel player. These performances were a nod to disco events being centred around prerecorded DJed music.<sup>170</sup> Philip Brophy wrote a theoretical text to accompany the project, which was published in *Art & Text*,<sup>171</sup> in which he provided a semiotic analysis of the meaning of disco as a subcultural “style,” in the vein of Hebdige and his peers at the University of Birmingham’s Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies.

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<sup>167</sup> Brophy, *Made by*  $\rightarrow \uparrow \rightarrow$ , 82.

<sup>168</sup> Darren Tofts, “ $\rightarrow \uparrow \rightarrow$  & Beyond: Anticipating Distributed Aesthetics,” *The Fibreculture Journal*, no. 7 (2005), accessed August 11, 2014, <http://seven.fibreculturejournal.org/fcj-039-beyond-anticipating-distributed-aesthetics/>.

<sup>169</sup> Robert Rooney, “AGE 16.7.80” in *Made by*  $\rightarrow \uparrow \rightarrow$ , ed. Philip Brophy (Northcote:  $\rightarrow \uparrow \rightarrow$ , 1983), 84.

<sup>170</sup> Chapter Music, “What Is This Thing Called ‘Disco?’,” Chapter Music Bandcamp, accessed January 4, 2018, <https://chaptermusic.bandcamp.com/album/what-is-this-thing-called-disco>.

<sup>171</sup> Philip Brophy, “What is This Thing Called ‘Disco?’,” *Art & Text*, no. 3 (1981): 59-66.



Figure 5. Poster for gig featuring Asphixiation and Essendon Airport, 1980. Designed by Philip Brophy.

The theoretical focus on subcultural style that Brophy as well as others at the Centre held can be linked further to the specific concerns of Melbourne’s nascent postmodernism in art and music, around appropriation, semiotics and post-structuralism. These are discussions that were solidified around the literature of *Art & Text*. It is my interpretation that rather than engaging with subculture as a means of working class resistance as imagined by cultural studies scholars such as Hebdige, → ↑ → was concerned particularly with the linguistic formations of style as well as subcultural capital (a concept devised by sociologist Sarah Thornton, as discussed in the Introduction). Further, the group demonstrated a willingness to interrogate the aesthetics and concerns of popular or “low” culture alongside—not in contrast to—the “high” culture of Modernism and the avant-garde; this willingness in itself was one of the defining characteristics of cultural postmodernism. As Chesworth reflected in 2016: “us younger folk (early twenties) wanted to pursue (rather than negate) the idea

of desire and explore aspects of the signifier/signified relationship as it was played out within mainstream culture.”<sup>172</sup>

Retrospectively, Martin has written critically of some Australian postmodernists’ depoliticised use of the language of resistance in their practices and writings, commenting:

Not that this generation is more particularly disposed towards colonialist fantasies than any other; it’s more that, having missed out on the spectacular politicisation afforded earlier artworkers by Vietnam or November 1975, there wasn’t anything else to do but *invent* a state of oppression and resistance by posing (with uneasy humour) as a “white aborigine.”<sup>173</sup>

This use of the dubious phrase “white aborigine” was a reference to Paul Taylor’s 1982 text “Popism – The Art of White Aborigines,” in which Taylor claims “POPISM, [both as the name of his 1982 exhibition as well as a term he applies to describe the tendencies of Australian postmodernist artists more generally] like the aboriginal nomads, can therefore find a metaphor for itself in its existence on the surface and edges of the existing landscape.”<sup>174</sup> Responding to the fragmented and imported nature of Australian identity, Taylor claims that:

A search for a regional Australian culture, ultimately a worthless pastime, reveals a centrifugal impulse wherein our art, like the mythopoeic Dreamtime of the aborigines, is the flak of an explosion not of our detonation.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> Chesworth and Dale, 222.

<sup>173</sup> Martin, “Before and After *Art & Text*,” 115.

<sup>174</sup> Paul Taylor, “Popism – the Art of White Aborigines,” in *What Is Appropriation?: An Anthology of Writings on Australian Art in the 1980s and 1990s*, 2nd ed., ed. Rex Butler (Brisbane: IMA Publishing, 2004), 86.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

Taylor's notion is a problematic projection of colonial identity onto indigenous Australian culture. It is one that draws to mind novelist Norman Mailer's 1957 essay "The White Negro," commenting on white Americans appropriating black American jazz culture in the 1950s as a means of individualist self-expression against conformist mass culture.<sup>176</sup>

The Clifton Hill Community Music Centre's attempts at a criticism of musical hierarchy, both in terms of composition and in professionalism of the academic institution, led to ideological conflicts and critical disagreements. A prominent example, which articulates well some proponents of the Centre's self-reflexive critique of their own institution, developed when a staged interview of a performance by Splinter Faction (Rainer Linz and Elaine Davies) with Robert Goodge was submitted to *New Music*, breaking from the magazine's editorial format of having independent audience members review performances and then interview the performers. While the review and interview was still published it was accompanied by a strongly worded editorial by Brophy stating:

The urge for such an anarchistic gesture [to present a scripted interview in conflict with the magazine's editorial guidelines] actually conveys more precisely a pathetic wish for individualist freedom – a stance that for all its pure intentions is essentially blind, producing only self-indulgent, theatrical, and impotent actions and ideas. Considering that Splinter Faction are in reality MUSIC STUDENTS (i.e. institutionalized education, etc.) it is no wonder that their blindness causes them to see something like this magazine as being oppressive and restricted to their "creative" urges.<sup>177</sup>

This acerbic comment is telling of the conflicting ideologies of the time at the Centre; of on one hand a want for expressive individualism that is critical of institutions, but

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<sup>176</sup> Norman Mailer, "The White Negro," *Dissent Magazine*, June 20, 2007, accessed December 29, 2017, [https://www.dissentmagazine.org/online\\_articles/the-white-negro-fall-1957](https://www.dissentmagazine.org/online_articles/the-white-negro-fall-1957).

<sup>177</sup> Philip Brophy and David Chesworth, Editorial comment, *New Music*, no. 3, (1980): 27.

also an acknowledgement of such a critique's problematic nature. Following the publication of this text and the accompanying editorial comment, the Centre's first formal meeting was called, to discuss management matters of the Centre but also the conflicting ideologies raised in this Splinter Faction and *New Music* affair. As a resolution of the meeting, a paper presented at the meeting by Philip Brophy apologising for the editorial comment was published in the following issue of *New Music*, acknowledging that the editorial comment served to affect and guide the *New Music* readers' interpretations of the original review and interview.<sup>178</sup>

### **Affordable technology and media at the Centre, as well as its relation to amateurism**

Despite the Centre's open door policy with regard to what could be performed, certain stylistic traits in the performances did begin to emerge. It has been noted that the aesthetic characteristics of performances were often shaped by the Centre's "no finance" principle. Some performers turned towards the use of low-budget instruments (or toys and found objects repurposed as instruments), given the Centre did not provide any equipment or payment to performers. As Althoff notes, attempting to outline the anti-hierarchical intentions of the Centre's approach to musical equipment: "It was well-accepted that low-budget equipment helped to 'shape' the music, not devalue it; there was no stigma attached to its use, although some music students claimed they hated the sounds of out-of-tune toy organs."<sup>179</sup> Nonetheless, while Althoff makes a case for there having been no stigma in using low-budget equipment, certainly performers would not have been naïve to this having been an aesthetic provocation, a sentiment confirmed by his note on the academic music students' distastes for it. One can conclude that this aesthetic "amateurism" was in itself a conscious reaction against the academically acceptable practices of experimental music that the Centre positioned itself outside of, in which the performers deliberately

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<sup>178</sup> Philip Brophy and David Chesworth, Editorial comment, *New Music*, no. 4 (1980): 2.

<sup>179</sup> Althoff, 39.

eschewed any virtuosity or musicianship that they may have had. While in more institutional contexts this musicianship might have been a form of cultural capital, in this experimental music context it was quite the opposite—“amateurism” was more a sign of distinction—an inversion of the more academic institutional style. As observed by Martin, the amateurism of performers at the Centre, as well as Melbourne postmodernist artists and musicians more generally, was reflective of their interest in *bricolage*—a term also famously borrowed by Hebdige from anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, in his studies of the bricolage of subcultural style.<sup>180</sup> Martin notes:

Hence the necessity for some of us at the time to try everything at once, several kinds of theory alongside several kinds of practice, as a way of radically refusing the ideology of specialisation, authority, professionalism.<sup>181</sup>

This stylistic and consciously applied amateurism, or “militant dilettantism” to quote Brophy,<sup>182</sup> could be seen as a form of “subcultural capital.” As subcultural capital, aesthetic “amateurism” might be chosen by artists as a signifier of an “authentic” taste, rather than out of necessity due to the economic conditions of its authorship. Subcultural capital can be understood as an operative element within a taste culture, a sub-economy, rather than outside of the capitalist economy itself. In his 2013 essay “The Primitive Accumulation of Cool,” editor of the *New Inquiry* Rob Horning discusses how in contemporary digital consumption the consumer is primarily concerned with individualistic tastes and their development of an identity;<sup>183</sup> in this environment “cool,” which could be likened to Thornton’s concept of subcultural capital, becomes an ideological incentive towards consumption. Horning’s adaptation of the Marxist term primitive accumulation in this sense is to imply capital’s disruptive conquest over style. While Horning’s concern is with consumption in the digital age

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<sup>180</sup> Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, 10th ed. (London: Routledge, 1997), 102-106.

<sup>181</sup> Martin, “Before and After *Art & Text*,” 109.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> Rob Horning, “The Primitive Accumulation of Cool,” *The New Inquiry*, June 4, 2013, accessed August 27, 2015, <http://thenewinquiry.com/blogs/marginal-utility/the-primitive-accumulation-of-cool/>.

decades later than the era I have discussed in this chapter, we see in this chapter the foregrounding of subcultural style in underground music cultures—something that later became an imperative for consumption more broadly. In the Centre a particular notion of authenticity was bound up with specific uses of media. The democratisation afforded by this media (for instance cassette recorders and toy instruments), as well as a valuing of amateurism, had an aesthetic character that became a form of subcultural capital. As we will see, this is a tendency that became more pronounced in ensuing decades, as with the “lo-fi” aesthetic that I discuss in Chapter Four.

## **Conclusion**

The Clifton Hill Community Music Centre was founded with an organisational structure that critiqued existing music institutions; from the “high” culture of Modernism and avant-garde music within universities and public institutions, to the popular music of the mass record industry. This anti-institutional sentiment drew from various cultural movements internationally, from French post-structuralist and postmodernist theory, US West Coast counterculture, to the punk movement. The Centre’s central premise of allowing anybody, regardless of musical background, a platform from which to perform echoed distinctly the calls of the “DIY ethos” occurring notably in punk music. Punk occurred contemporaneously to the Centre around the world, but the Centre’s “anyone can do it” ethos was also an attitude that reflected experimental music cultures since the 1960s.

The Centre was a site for experimentation with anti-hierarchical and decentralised organisational structures, and also at times praised individualist self-expression over musical conformity. A tension between Modernist principles of the older generation (in their thirties) and the postmodernist principles of the younger generation of musicians (in their twenties) at the Centre was often at play. Certain styles and tastes in performance types did however inevitably become privileged at the Centre. A number of performers for instance, despite their education or ability, opted towards a style of “amateurism,” arguably because for the anti-institutional context of the Centre



this endowed their performances with a kind of legitimacy among the inner circle, as well as for the performers a particular degree of “subcultural capital.” This “subcultural capital” could be found not only in performance style, but also through a conscious adoption of, and finding new ways of using, affordable musical equipment and media. Whether or not this use of affordable equipment was indeed necessitated by the performers due to the Centre’s anti-finance principle. Some performers also maintained institutional links such as to universities, through which more costly and less readily accessible media may have been, and at some stages was, obtained. The “amateurism” of performers at the Centre was a means of expressing distinction from the dominant institutional approaches to the production of avant-garde music. Other ways in which the Centre asserted distinction and gained a sense of legitimacy were their principles of anti-hierarchy as well as their DIY economy.

The Centre also became a significant site for early Australian cultural postmodernism, with its concerns for exploring quotation, crossovers between popular culture and high Modernism (or high art/low art discourses) as well as subcultural style. Viewed retrospectively, it is my conclusion that the Centre emerged in a period in which the beginnings of a paradigm shift in music production and consumption was starting to occur. The concerns of the DIY ethos take a central position in ensuing years in the production and consumption of music beyond the underground, as well as culture and sociality more broadly in the digital age and with the emergence of neoliberalism.

In this chapter, with my analysis of the Centre, I have largely focused on the cultural context of the DIY ethos in music production. Technological developments are also significant for understanding shifts in the production, consumption and cultures of music-making globally and in Australia. Prior to the introduction of the World Wide Web, one technology was already having a significant effect on the production and consumption of music: the cassette tape. In the following chapter I discuss punk and post-punk music in Melbourne, a community that was developing concurrently with the Centre, with some of the same individuals participating in both. I consider the importance of the cassette for this culture. In particular, my analysis sets its focus on

the *Fast Forward* cassette magazine, an innovative DIY initiative for which the cassette was of key importance.

## Chapter Three

### *Fast Forward* Cassette Magazine and Melbourne's DIY Post-Punk Community

Australia was content with bland pop and putrid boogie. But content only because it had no choice. The major record companies dictate taste in Australia, and being what they are their taste is naturally very conservative.

— Clinton Walker, 1982<sup>184</sup>

It's hard to describe the chasm that existed between 'indie' (independent) and DIY and major record companies [...] We were putting out records that were getting released around the world to bands that were moving to England and playing; *Countdown* didn't touch them, major radio didn't touch those things, major record stores didn't touch them, fuck them, we were quite happy with that!

— Bruce Milne, 2017<sup>185</sup>

If one were to hear *Fast Forward* playing from a stereo in 1981, it would sound much like a radio program, a variety show of local Australian music and its international counterparts. But something was a little unusual about the program. Rather than the “Oz rock” anthems often heard on Australian commercial radio at the time, one particular *Fast Forward* program opens with bizarre and atonal synth noises, without any discernable beat or melody. On top of these sounds, chanted vocals run through effects processing proclaiming the “Age Of The Fun Cassette,” an obviously playful allusion by the artist Excitement Pathetix to the medium that allowed them to create and distribute this piece. Later in the program one hears the hypnotic and minimal synth punk of a Melbourne group named Artificial Organs, and later still, an interview with the renowned British post-punk group Gang of Four. Listening to the program

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<sup>184</sup> Walker, *Inner City Sound*, 5.

<sup>185</sup> Bruce Milne, interview by Jared Davis, Melbourne, August 24, 2017, audio recording.

one gets wind of a stylistically diverse, experimental, and globally connected music scene happening within Melbourne where the program was recorded. However, this was not in fact a conventional radio show. The program was not heard via local and short range broadcast, but by pressing play on a cassette. *Fast Forward*, an audio magazine in the form of a cassette tape, shone a focus on the undercurrents of Australia's DIY post-punk and experimental music communities. Unlike highly localised commercial radio, the content presented on *Fast Forward* was sent in its cassette form via mail networks both nationally and internationally.



Figure 6. *Fast Forward* issue 7, October 1981.

In this chapter I want to expand upon the discussion begun in the previous one in relation to Melbourne post-punk musicians. This was a loose-knit community of musicians and music fans that desired freedom of expression outside of the tastes determined by the mainstream recording industry, in the tradition of the punk “DIY ethos.” Like the concerns of the Clifton Hill Community Music Centre, Melbourne’s post-punk community foregrounded increased access to the production of music, with an attitude that anybody could become involved regardless of their musical proficiency. The cassette tape was one piece of technology that became crucial for the

harnessing of this anti-institutional spirit in order to develop DIY practices in Australia as well as internationally. The subject of this chapter's case study is *Fast Forward* cassette magazine, a globally influential proponent of the new cassette culture of the 1980s founded in Melbourne. *Fast Forward* was a magazine in the form of a cassette tape, featuring new music, audio interviews and discussion, somewhat like a recorded radio program, which operated between 1980 and 1982. The magazine also contained a printed sleeve featuring text. I argue in this thesis that an emphasis in music consumption has shifted from a commodification of content (vinyl albums for instance) to a commodification of the platform (the means through which recorded music is distributed), in which users have greater agency to be participatory consumers (as with digital streaming platforms). My argument is that the adoption of cassette technology by DIY music cultures offers the most significant early example of a shift towards this new culture of the platform. As demonstrated by *Fast Forward* cassette magazine, Melbourne and Australia's distinct position as simultaneously attached to and on the periphery of a larger post-punk community in the UK made it uniquely placed to explore new modes of pre-digital global networking via cassette media.

### **The beginnings of punk rock in Australia and its post-punk second wave**

When the first wave of punk rock began in the mid-1970s in the UK and the US, similar musical developments were taking place concurrently across Australia. Although their formation preceded the popularity of the term "punk" in Australia, Brisbane group The Saints' founding in the mid-1970s could be considered as a key moment in punk music's emerging embrace of DIY practice. The Saints were significantly more brash and brazen in their sound than the rock bands that were commercially popular in Australia at the time. Their guitar sounds were noisy, aggressive and energetic. Importantly, their sound was imperfect and unpolished, in contrast to the technical proficiency of mainstream rock acts of the day. The group's 1976 debut single (*I'm*) *Stranded* was self-released by the band's own record label Fatal, a label founded due to the group's unwillingness to compromise musically in order to align with rock music tastes in Brisbane at the time, as Australian music

journalist Clinton Walker has observed.<sup>186</sup> Sydney group Radio Birdman also emerged in the mid-1970s as figureheads in the roots of Australian punk music. Writing for the Australian fanzine *Pulp*, music writer Janet Austin commented: “When the band was formed, in 1974, music was weighed down with a heavy dependence on musical expertise and resultant snobbery [...] Radio Birdman were different ‘cos they weren’t serious musos as such.”<sup>187</sup> This remark directed at Radio Birdman’s lack of emphasis on musicianship outlines a focus on musical amateurism, a key trait of the emerging punk movement. Amateurism is an ethos that favours intention in musical performance over technical proficiency. This is a similar ethos that is discussed in the previous chapter with regard to the activities of the Clifton Hill Community Music Centre, which David Chesworth noted traversed both the activities of post-Cagean experimental music practices as well as punk and post-punk.

In popular music, amateurism found particular prominence within the punk movement for its aesthetic opposition to the musical proficiency of mainstream music culture. Socio-musicologist and rock critic Simon Frith has noted that this binary view of aesthetic opposition in punk music has its roots in fact earlier in American garage rock bands of the 1960s, bands that are sometimes referred to as “proto-punk”:

[The opposition between] harsh versus soothing, energy versus art, the “raw” (lyrics constructed around simple syllables, a three-chord lack of technique, a “primitive” beat, spontaneous performance) versus the “cooked” (rock poetry, virtuosity, technical complexity, big-studio production). The signs of this musical realism, this form of “unmediated” emotion, were, in fact, drawn from well-known rock ‘n’ roll conventions - conventions which had been established by American garage bands.<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> Walker, *Inner City Sound*, 13.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>188</sup> Frith, 158-159. While not directly referenced in his text, it might be presumed here that Frith’s use of the terminology “raw” and “cooked” is borrowed from the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss.

This “unmediated emotion” that Frith refers to is certainly present in the aesthetics of The Saints and Radio Birdman during the mid-1970s. By 1977, thanks to the notoriety of the Sex Pistols in London, the term “punk” had become well established, and Melbourne group → ↑ → were organising a series of concerts entitled *Punk Gunk*, and were performing a “punk set” alongside their various stylistic interpretations, that featured covers of early punk material.<sup>189</sup>

Expanding upon the developments of this initial punk movement, various active post-punk scenes began to emerge across Australia in the late 1970s and into the early 1980s, alongside artist-led, independent record labels and initiatives. Inspired by influences largely from the UK, as well as the developments of local music communities, at the heart of Australian post-punk were new independent releases by emerging record labels such as Innocent (Melbourne, founded by David Chesworth and Philip Brophy), Au Go Go (Melbourne, founded by Bruce Milne and Philip Morland)<sup>190</sup> and M-Squared (Sydney). Many of these labels and initiatives took advantage of the affordability and improving quality of cassette technology such as Terse Tapes (Sydney, founded by Tom Ellard),<sup>191</sup> Pedestrian Tapes (Sydney, founded by Rik Rue)<sup>192</sup> and the *Fast Forward* cassette magazine (Melbourne).

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<sup>189</sup> Walker, *Inner City Sound*, 14.

<sup>190</sup> Milne.

Au Go Go, “Au Go Go Record Store & Label Website,” Au Go Go, accessed January 4, 2018, <http://www.augogo.com/master.html>.

<sup>191</sup> Clinton Walker, “The Cassette Development: Terse Tapes’ Lucky Dip of Quasi-Normal Tapes,” *Rolling Stone* (9 July, 1981).

<sup>192</sup> John Oswald, “Cassetricity,” in *Cassette Mythos*, ed. Robin James (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 1992), 2.





Figure 7. *Fast Forward* issue 1, inner sleeve, November 1980.

## The prehistory of the 1980s cassette explosion: from the origins of the medium to the Sony Walkman

In order to establish the context for the adoption of cassette media by Melbourne DIY musicians, in particular by *Fast Forward*, it is important first to briefly outline the history of the medium. First released in 1963 by the Philips Company, the cassette tape revolutionised home recording in the ensuing decades, becoming a “music maker for the masses” due to its comparative affordability in the recording and copying of music.<sup>193</sup> Philips, perhaps foreseeing the medium’s potential for the sharing and production of music, would forego exclusive manufacturing rights of the cassette, allowing the cassette tape to explode in popularity as a near universal medium.<sup>194</sup>

<sup>193</sup> Steve Jones, “The Cassette Underground,” *Popular Music and Society* 14, no. 1 (1990): 76.

<sup>194</sup> Rob Drew, “New Technologies and the Business of Music: Lessons from the 1980s Home Taping Hearings,” *Popular Music and Society* 37, no. 3 (2014): 254-255.



Upon their initial release, cassette tapes offered relatively poor sound recording quality when compared with vinyl records. However, throughout the 1960s cassettes began to increase in popularity among music listeners as a result of their capabilities for recording music from radio broadcasts for future playback. As early as 1969, the Marketing Vice President of record label giant RCA was quoted as stating: “These combination cassette-radio units, which permit the consumer to record as he listens ... have all kinds of implications which frighten the whole music industry.”<sup>195</sup> One of these implications was the threat of a paradigm shift in the LP (long play) record-oriented mode of music consumption that the music industry had invested heavily into up until this point. Another implication was the ability for home taping to allow listeners to make free copies of records and broadcasts. Finally, the cassette tape began to offer a medium for musicians to produce and distribute their music themselves, outside of the record industry model that had dominated due in no small part to the sheer expense of producing a record up until this time.<sup>196</sup>

Media studies scholar Rob Drew has observed that a significant trend that began to emerge with home taping was that of “selection taping,” or copying individual tracks from albums or radio broadcasts. Citing a 1982 survey by Warner that noted home tapers recording single-track selections outnumbered those copying full albums by two to one, Drew commented: “Listeners were ‘disaggregating’ albums and, evidently, deriving meaning and pleasure from it.”<sup>197</sup> The discussion here around deriving “meaning” speaks somewhat to the semiotic plays that were of interest to the artists discussed in the previous chapter and their postmodern plays on subcultural style. Not only could the cassette tape give *musicians* agency to produce their own recordings outside of the record industries processes, but it provided a new sense of agency for the *consumer* in becoming more active and productive with the process of selecting

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<sup>195</sup> Ibid., 254.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., 259.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., 263.

tracks and creating compilations, a process now commonly known as “mix taping.”<sup>198</sup> The productive consumption of mix taping is an important development in foreshadowing the high level of personalisation and customisation prominent in contemporary digital platforms of “prosumption,” such as those offered by social media.<sup>199</sup> Furthermore, this new trend offered a significant threat to the record industry’s comfortable status quo with the LP record or album, a format that had become an industry mainstay since its initial introduction in 1948. As Drew has observed, while the long play album was in essence a practical application of a vinyl format, intended for start-to-finish playback on a turntable, it had become *du jour* for the industry (making up 92% of record industry sales by 1972) as a format for its higher prices and profit margins than singles, as well as the increased “cultural cachet” that the album had developed over the years through record label investment in the format.<sup>200</sup> Drew quotes media and popular music studies academic Keir Knightly who comments: “The institution of the [...] album simultaneously minimized risk, maximized profit for record labels *and* contributed to a heightened symbolic capital.”<sup>201</sup> Although the album format emerged for practical reasons—being the need for a succession of tracks that logically followed on from one another so that a record side could be listened to from start to finish—the format became viewed as having a greater degree of cultural capital than the 7” single format, and certainly the cassette.

Beyond the popularity of cassettes for home-taping, by the early 1980s the cassette had become a valuable tool for musicians to network and distribute their material independently of major record labels. Music journalist Neil Strauss has noted that some artists such as German krautrock group Faust, as well as British experimental music and performance art group Throbbing Gristle embraced the medium early, adding legitimacy to the format and encouraging others to trade their own cassettes. Strauss comments that:

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<sup>198</sup> Ibid., 265.

<sup>199</sup> See chapters Five and Six.

<sup>200</sup> Drew, 263-264.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid., 263.

One of the only other ways to distribute and obtain cassettes at this time was through newsletters, and Throbbing Gristle put out one of the first newsletters calling for strange cassettes, providing an impetus for many others to begin trading tapes. Other newsletters for home tapers soon sprouted.<sup>202</sup>

While early cassette technology offered notably poor quality recordings, engineering developments had improved the sound quality and capabilities of cassettes significantly by the late 1970s. The Philips Corporation's open licensing for the manufacturing of their invention allowed other companies to improve upon cassette technology while still maintaining necessary compatibility to Philips' specifications; one such instance being noise reduction developed by Ray Dolby at the Ampex Corporation.<sup>203</sup> Cassettes had been introduced into car stereos soon after the technology's development in the mid-1960s, and the popularity of in-car cassettes continued to grow during the 1970s into the 1980s as cassette technology and quality improved.<sup>204</sup>

The growing popularity of the cassette by the beginning of the 1980s tells a particularly important story regarding the relation between the consumption of music (and consumer behaviours) and media and technology. Important developments in media have allowed listening to recorded music to transform from what was once a private act of consumption in the domestic space to blur with daily life in the public sphere. These developments include the car stereo and portable transistor radio, but most importantly by the 1980s, the Sony Walkman, a small portable cassette player which allowed a consumer to listen to music while mobile through headphones.<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> Neil Strauss, "Putting the Net over Networking," in *Cassette Mythos*, ed. Robin James (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 1992), 130.

<sup>203</sup> Drew, 255.

<sup>204</sup> Meaghan Garvey, "The Evolution of Playing Music in Your Car," *Complex*, February 11, 2015, accessed December 13, 2017, <http://www.complex.com/music/2015/02/the-evolution-of-playing-music-in-your-car/>.

<sup>205</sup> Paul du Gay, Stuart Hall, Linda Janes, Hugh Mackay, and Keith Negus, *Doing Cultural Studies: The Story of the Sony Walkman* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 1997), 8-21.

Milne has himself acknowledged the significance of the Walkman with regard to *Fast Forward*, noting:

You've also got to remember with *Fast Forward* that just before *Fast Forward* came out, the Sony Walkman and all the other versions of that started hitting the market, so it was suddenly really easy to be walking around with a cassette player that wasn't a "boom box."<sup>206</sup>

Debuting in 1979, the Walkman has received a variety of somewhat mythologised origin stories. These include an idea had by Sony company founder Akio Morita for a device to occupy time during long international flights, or of him noting that his children were frustrated by the fact that they could not listen to music while travelling.<sup>207</sup> A former Deputy General Manager at Sony's advertising department, Shu Ueyama, however contends that a deliberated collective process was behind the development of the device. Ueyama recalled a need by Sony's tape recorder division to develop an innovative new product in light of the fact that an organisational change had resulted in radio-cassette-recorders being given to the radio division of the company. After the original Walkman was released in 1979, consumer behaviour determined the future design of the product. Initially, the Walkman featured two headphone jacks allowing for users to listen in company. When Sony observed that individuals were largely using the product alone, the more archetypal second release of the Walkman, the Mk2, featured only a single headphone jack.<sup>208</sup> Cultural studies scholars Paul du Gay, Stuart Hall, Linda Janes, Hugh Mackay and Keith Negus note:

The Walkman, then, was not simply presented as a device for individual listening – it *became* this through a process in which production and consumption were articulated. [...] Consumer activities were crucial to the introduction,

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<sup>206</sup> Milne.

<sup>207</sup> du Gay et al., 42.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., 59.

modification and subsequent redevelopment and marketing of this product.<sup>209</sup>

While Sony launched the Walkman by marketing the product internationally with region specific characteristics, such as an initial launch that marketed the product under different names in different countries, the Walkman ultimately was seen as a truly global product. Decisions had been made by Sony to make the Walkman and other products of theirs universal. Du Gay et al. have commented that this was enacted by introducing firstly an international warranty system, allowing Sony products purchased anywhere in the world to be serviced in different countries. Secondly, Sony standardised the electronics of their cassette players allowing them to be run on dry cell batteries, avoiding regional specificity of different electricity systems around the world.<sup>210</sup> Crucially, as du Gay et al. note, Sony's efforts were taking place at a period in which the term "globalisation" was increasingly becoming incorporated into corporate strategy.<sup>211</sup>

My argument in this thesis is that Melbourne DIY experimental and independent musicians made use of the cassette medium to develop global networks, and develop a global music scene that foreshadowed the coming of the digital age. Therefore, the cassette's status discussed above as a global medium is significant. Further, the development of the Walkman and its place within culture relates to another key

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<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid., 78. Globalisation refers to the developments of an increasingly decentralised global trade, as well as the cosmopolitan culture of global capitalism developing throughout the 1980s. Sony, despite often being regarded as a distinctly Japanese company with its business practices (in its corporate hierarchy, as well as with its Japanese cultural traditions in the workplace), was in other ways an embodiment of a new globalised and cosmopolitan corporation model in the 1980s. For one, Sony was noted to engage in flexible American-styled business management practices through the 1980s. Furthermore, the company developed globalised manufacturing processes to reduce costs. The specific context of Japanese-US relations on technology companies such as Sony is important to note also in this discussion. Sony emerged in the post-World War II period, in which the US held a large influence politically as well as culturally. After the war, the US occupied Japan until 1952 and restrictions were imposed on Japan disallowing the Japanese production of weapons. In this context, infrastructure that had been developed for military weapons manufacturing was repurposed for the manufacturing of consumer goods. From the earlier days of Sony in its post-war founding, a global, and particularly American influence was evident. As du Gay et al. have noted, Sony's company name at once refers to the Latin word for sound, *sonus*, but at the same time was chosen as a word as it appears "placeless" or "global" and is easily pronounced in different languages. Ibid., 47-50, 78-79.

discussion of my thesis, on the role of media and socio-political changes, particularly with regard to the rise of neoliberalism. As Du Gay et al. have commented, the manner in which the Thatcher administration in late 1970s and early 1980s Britain “sought to privilege the private provision and consumption of goods and services over collective provision and consumption,” as well as its focus on entrepreneurial individualism, resulted in a public with a growing desire for privatised and individualistic leisure activities.<sup>212</sup>

Subsequently, some cultural studies scholars considered the Sony Walkman to be symbolically significant of the shift from public communality to private and individualistic behaviour under neoliberalism and its “enterprise culture.” Various cultural studies scholars have observed the way in which the Walkman allowed individuals to disengage with their social surroundings in order to concentrate on their own private enjoyment.<sup>213</sup>

At the beginning of the 1980s, stigma around the cassette as a lesser format than the LP remained thanks to the record industry’s efforts.<sup>214</sup> The popularity of the Walkman however helped grow the medium’s success significantly. By 1982, initiatives such as ReachOut International Records, a label that exclusively released cassettes, were beginning. This New York label’s release by US hardcore punk band Bad Brains became the highest selling cassette-only release at that time, with 27,000 units sold.<sup>215</sup> Drew has also pointed out that in this same year successful independent cassette releases by artists including Metallica as well as Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five served as a springboard to these artists’ careers.<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>212</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

<sup>214</sup> From 1968 Columbia had begun packaging vinyl albums with an inner sleeve touting the format, proclaiming: “Remember ... It always happens first on records.” Drew, 255.

<sup>215</sup> Strauss, 132.

<sup>216</sup> Drew, 261.

## The birth of the “cassette culture” in Australia and globally

For experimental and independent musicians in Australia, as it was for those around the world, the cassette offered a cheaper means to record with the development of 4-track recorders in the 1970s, and 4-track recorders with inbuilt mixing desks released by Tascam and Fostex in 1980. This development occurred, as Milne has noted, “almost exactly” before the launch of *Fast Forward*.<sup>217</sup> Audio technology companies also began to contribute to a change in thinking about the path of a professional musician, away from that of gigging in order to be noticed by record labels and ultimately afforded studio recording, towards a more privatised recording process taking place in the home of the musician as consumer. Milne has commented that while these 4-track recorders were not necessarily completely affordable for DIY musicians, “people were banding together and buying these, or someone would have one and all their friends would be using it, so there was a big increase in the number of cassette [...] demos [at the beginning of the 1980s].”<sup>218</sup>

Music writer and independent radio DJ Dave Mandl has commented that musicians had been required to undertake a large amount of unpaid labour by way of producing demos for record labels, in order to achieve the earlier goal of releasing a “proper” LP record release. With the legitimisation of the cassette as a medium for releasing music, Mandl states that:

Instead of serving as part of a permanent volunteer farm team for the record companies, the new cassette artists reclaimed their independence and created a worldwide, decentralized communications web like those of the parallel mail art and self-published zine networks—and laid the foundation for a new autonomous

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<sup>217</sup> Milne.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid.

world of sound.<sup>219</sup>

Mandl's choice of language here in observing a "decentralized communications web" is of note, given its similarity to the how the Internet might be described. This article, looking back at the early 1980s, was published in 1992 during the very early years of the World Wide Web—before its widespread public adoption in the mid-1990s.

Mandl's observation adds weight to my argument that the use of cassettes by DIY musicians developed a prescient model for decentralised, user-led distribution before the Internet age. The rise of cassette tapes marked the beginning of a new turf war between two industries. In one corner was the major record labels, who had up until this point maintained a monopoly on the means of musical content's production. In the other corner there was the electronics and technology companies, who are in the business of selling platforms for the production and distribution of music (content). These same electronics companies funded a lobbying group in the 1980s, the Audio Recording Rights Coalition, to support the rights of home tapers (marketing themselves, as Drew has observed as "a voice of the people").<sup>220</sup> This ultimately expanded into increased lobbying and legal challenges during the 1980s from entertainment industry giants seeking to curtail home taping, with a milestone being the 1984 Sony vs. Universal "Betamax" case.<sup>221</sup> In this case, Universal took legal action against Sony for "contributory infringement" for the sale of its Betamax video recorders. The court ruled in favour of Sony, however the case set into motion lobbying from the music and entertainment industries for new royalty systems to be introduced that allowed them to profit from audio and video recording.<sup>222</sup> The arguments around home taping through the 1980s were famously led by the music industry with the infamous and completely fictitious slogan "Home Taping Is Killing Music."<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>219</sup> Dave Mandl, "The Death of the Demo Tape (at Last)," in *Cassette Mythos*, ed. Robin James (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 1992), 50.

<sup>220</sup> Drew, 257.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid., 254.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid., 255.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid., 258.



By the beginning of the 1980s, improving sound quality and affordability meant that cassettes had become a useful tool for experimental and independent musicians, furthering the spirit of the DIY ethos espoused by the punk movement. In Australia, as well as around the world, many emerging independent record labels and artists took advantage of the cassette as a means of self-releasing music. Labels in Australia such as Terse Tapes, M-Squared, Pedestrian Tapes and Cosmic Conspiracy (all from Sydney) released experimental music and post-punk cassettes. These developments reflected the rise of “cassette culture” internationally.

This term “cassette culture” emerged to refer to an explosion of activity around do-it-yourself home taping among amateur musicians from this period, as well as the mail distribution networks between artists, the radio programs that gave airplay to DIY cassettes, the fanzines that covered the releases and the new communities that arose from all of this. The term grew prominent within fanzines of the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>224</sup> “Cassette culture” was not limited to a distinct genre, but rather was chiefly concerned with challenging the norms of music production and distribution of the day, as dictated by the recording industry. Alongside an enthusiasm towards the cassette as a means of distribution, there was an interest among experimental musicians in the use of the cassette tape for the production of new musical codes. For instance, in the previous chapter we saw how Graeme Davies used the cassette as a democratised instrument. Likewise the Sydney musician Rik Rue, founder of the Pedestrian Tapes label, was an Australian frontrunner in using the cassette recorder as an instrument for his sound collage works.<sup>225</sup>

By the end of the 1980s, cassette culture had boomed into a global underground, even as a new digital delivery medium for music had emerged in the form of the compact

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<sup>224</sup> Harper, 141.

<sup>225</sup> Clinton Green, “The Australian Cassette Underground: A Historical Overview,” *The Living Archive of Underground Music*, November 7, 2011, accessed January 8, 2018, [http://livingarchive.doncampau.com/feature\\_articles/history-of-australian-underground-by-clinton-green](http://livingarchive.doncampau.com/feature_articles/history-of-australian-underground-by-clinton-green).

disc (CD). At this time however, the CD was “read only” for consumers (recordable CDs did not become widely available until well into the 1990s).<sup>226</sup> A 1987 article by Jon Pareles for the *New York Times* entitled “Record-It-Yourself Music on Cassette” commented that a “new underground of musicians” are using the cassette to “bypass the music business,” with an informal network “that extends across North America and from Australia to Yugoslavia.”<sup>227</sup> One example of a cassette tape mail network in Australia was Michael Sprague’s Environmental Tape Exchange. For this project, Sprague requested individuals take a recording from outside their window and send the tape to him in Australia. Sprague would then act as a conduit for tape recordings from around the world, mailing participants in return an environmental tape recording sent to him from somewhere else on the globe.<sup>228</sup>



Figure 8. Terse Tapes advertisement, *Fast Forward* issue 7, October 1981.

<sup>226</sup> Philips Research, “The History of the CD – The CD Family,” Philips Research, accessed February 1, 2018, <https://www.philips.com/a-w/research/technologies/cd/cd-family.html>.

<sup>227</sup> Jon Pareles, “Record-It-Yourself Music on Cassette,” *The New York Times*, May 11, 1987, accessed February 17, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/1987/05/11/arts/record-it-yourself-music-on-cassette.html>.

<sup>228</sup> Strauss, 132.

## ***Fast Forward* and fanzine culture**

*Fast Forward* was the brainchild of Melbourne music enthusiasts Bruce Milne, Andrew Maine and Michael Trudgeon,<sup>229</sup> then a graphic designer. At the time of *Fast Forward*'s launch, Milne was active in the Melbourne post-punk community as an organiser of gigs, a band manager (such as for Rowland S. Howard's first group, the Young Charlatans) operating an independent record label, Au-Go-Go, working for Missing Link and Greville Records stores, as well as hosting a program on community radio station 3RRR.<sup>230</sup> *Fast Forward* cassette magazine was borne out of this new relative affordability of audio publishing that the cassette enabled, regularly espousing the cassette as a useful tool for DIY practice in their issues. Milne and Maine were the hosts of *Demo Derby*, a radio program devoted exclusively to demo cassette tape culture, providing a platform for broadcasting music that had been self-released by artists.<sup>231</sup> *Fast Forward* made use of cassette technology to increase the scale upon which independently released music could be distributed and heard. Extending beyond the restrictive inner Melbourne broadcast range of 3RRR, copies of *Fast Forward* were mailed across the country and internationally, creating a larger audience for local musicians and reciprocal exchange between independent music communities. Anecdotally, Milne has noted that one outcome of this new global reciprocity was the influence *Fast Forward* had on the founding of influential and still existent Seattle record label Sub Pop. Milne recalls: "Seattle was a bit like Australia and New Zealand – very isolated. That's why they had so much interesting music going on."<sup>232</sup> This

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<sup>229</sup> Trudgeon moved into research on technological innovation in the fields of architectural, industrial and interior design, and is currently Deputy Directory of the Victorian Eco-Innovation Lab (VEIL) for sustainable architecture research at the University of Melbourne. University of Melbourne, "Dr Michael Trudgeon," Melbourne School of Design, University of Melbourne, accessed December 13, 2017, <https://msd.unimelb.edu.au/people/michael-trudgeon>.

<sup>230</sup> René Schaefer, "Fast Forward: A Pre-Internet Story," *Mess+Noise*, September 19, 2011, accessed June 19, 2014, <http://www.messandnoise.com/articles/4331535>.

Clinton Walker, "Fanzines (1970s)," accessed January 31, 2016, <http://www.clintonwalker.com.au/fanzines-1970s.html>.

<sup>231</sup> Milne.

<sup>232</sup> Schaefer.

comment speaks to the reframing of provincialism as a positive trait discussed in the previous chapter.

Prior to *Fast Forward*, Milne had an established history in the publication of fanzines. He had produced *Plastered Press*, Australia's first punk fanzine, published as early as late 1976.<sup>233</sup> The following year, he along with music writers Clinton Walker and Janet Austin founded *Pulp*, ultimately publishing four issues, with elements of an unfinished fifth issue contributing towards Walker's definitive 1982 book documenting Australian punk and post-punk of the era, *Inner City Sound*.<sup>234</sup>

The term "fanzine" refers to do-it-yourself publications produced cheaply by music fans, using accessible printing methods such as photocopying and affordable staple-binding. Science fiction enthusiasts of the 1950s are credited with being the first to use the term "fanzine," although a long history of self-publishing dates back to early days of the printing press.<sup>235</sup> Often distributed directly from the zine publishers to local record stores, fanzines provided a backbone for the emerging punk movement and its DIY ethos in the mid-1970s. One of the earliest known DIY music fanzines, *Punk*, published in New York City by John Holmstrom, Ged Dunn and Legs McNeil from late 1975, helped popularise the term "punk" as a means to formally classify groups discussed in their pages, such as New York band The Ramones. The term "punk" had appeared a number of years earlier informally in descriptions of rock musicians by a number of music journalists, including notably Lester Bangs, Dave Marsh and Greg Shaw at *Creem* magazine.<sup>236</sup> Mark Perry's publication *Sniffin' Glue* was crucial for British fanzine culture. Its first issue, released in July of 1976, stated outright that its focus was on "punk rock," and this issue also placed an emphasis on coverage of The Ramones. These fanzines provided an opportunity for music listeners to receive

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<sup>233</sup> Walker, "Fanzines (1970s)."

<sup>234</sup> Ibid.

<sup>235</sup> Marion Leonard, "Paper Planes: Travelling the New Grrrl Geographies," in *Cool Places: Geographies of Youth Culture*, eds. Tracey Skelton and Gill Valentine (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 103.

<sup>236</sup> Steven Taylor, *False Prophet: Fieldnotes from the Punk Underground* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2003), 15-17.

information on records and bands largely ignored in the major music press, and actively encouraged the individual readers' own agency in defining their own tastes outside of major label rock music. Furthermore, fanzines prominently called upon music fans to publish articles on underrepresented music, or to produce their own music themselves. The famous punk rock call to arms "this is a chord, this is another, this is a third, now form a band" first appeared on the pages of a UK punk fanzine, *Sideburns*, in January 1977.<sup>237</sup>

The first Australian punk rock fanzine was Bruce Milne's *Plastered Press*, published by mimeograph in late 1976. In 1977 young music writers Walker and Andrew McMillan published the fanzine *SSuicide [sic] Alley*, featuring coverage of Brisbane band The Saints and Sydney's Radio Birdman. Walker has noted that from April 1977 he travelled from his then home of Brisbane to Sydney and Melbourne personally distributing the fanzine to record stores such as Sydney's White Light and Melbourne's Archie & Jugheads, which would shortly go on to be renamed Missing Link.<sup>238</sup> In Melbourne Walker met Milne, and the two soon after founded the *Pulp* fanzine mentioned above.

*Fast Forward* began in 1980 after Milne, Maine and Trudgeon met to discuss publishing a magazine that would make use of the cassette in order to include music and recorded interviews, as well as a printed sleeve with images and text. As noted, Milne and Maine had been hosting the 3RRR radio program *Demo Derby* presenting music from demo cassette tapes that had been sent in to the program directly from artists.<sup>239</sup> This radio program was preemptive of other magazines and radio shows

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<sup>237</sup> Moon, 2.

<sup>238</sup> Walker, "Fanzines (1970s)".

<sup>239</sup> Schaefer. Milne. 3RRR, founded in 1976, played a vital role in providing exposure to independent musicians in Melbourne who did not have access to the mainstream media, alongside PBS (founded in 1979) and the first community radio station to obtain a license, 3CR (also founded in 1976).

Triple R, "About Triple R > Profile," Triple R, accessed January 4, 2018, <https://www.rrr.org.au/about/profile>.

PBS 106.7FM, "About PBS," PBS 106.7FM, accessed January 4, 2018, <https://www.pbsfm.org.au/about>.

3CR Community Radio, "Who We Are," 3CR Community Radio, accessed January 4, 2018, <http://www.3cr.org.au/whoweare>.

internationally that provided a platform throughout the 1980s for reporting on the emerging cassette underground. One such significant publication for the coverage of the new DIY culture of cassettes was *Op*, published in Olympia, Washington by the Lost Music Network. The magazine began in 1979 for reviews and discussion of independent music. Beginning in its fifth issue in 1981, notably after Milne's *Demo Derby* radio show and *Fast Forward*, writer and Lost Music Network board member Graham Ingels contributed a regular column for *Op* entitled "Castanets," which aimed in its words "to introduce the reader to the wide and wonderful world of cassettes – the ultimate in decentralized production, manufacturing and distribution."<sup>240</sup> *Op* co-founder John Foster noted of the decision to allow Ingel's designated cassette-only review column:

Formerly, I had made the decision to review all recordings, regardless of their format or classification, in one large section. This, I felt, was in keeping with *Op*'s philosophy that all genres and presentations have equal validity and deserve equal treatment (this at a time when the LP was king). However, the first indy [independent] cassette-only releases were clearly a breed apart; their producers were as delighted with the cassette format as they were with the music.<sup>241</sup>

Foster's observation points to a new culture of cassette artists—of whom *Fast Forward* in Melbourne were proponents—that were becoming increasingly interested in the DIY process and possibilities of creative freedom that the format enabled. In 1984 *Op* ceased publication, however former staff set up the publications *Sound Choice* in Ojai, California and *Option* in New York, to continue in the spirit of the magazine. These new magazines also featured regular reviews of independently produced cassette records.<sup>242</sup>

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<sup>240</sup> Harper, 147.

<sup>241</sup> John Foster, "Op, 'Castanets,' and the Cassette Revolution," in *Cassette Mythos*, ed. Robin James (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 1992), 52.

<sup>242</sup> Harper, 41-42.

Milne and Maine would splice tapes together in the 3RRR radio studios in order to edit the *Demo Derby* radio programs. Subsequently, these newly acquired skills in cassette technology became a foundation for their initiation of the *Fast Forward* cassette magazine. Milne and Maine made use of their afterhours access to the 3RRR studios “between midnight and dawn” for the editing of *Fast Forward* issues.<sup>243</sup> Using cheaply obtained off-cast cassettes from manufacturers for their first issue, *Fast Forward* became an innovative means to distribute independent and self-published music content across Australia and internationally. While Milne had been offering a platform for independent demo tapes to receive an audience through the *Demo Derby* 3RRR radio program, he noted that as the station’s broadcast range was small at the time, listeners were largely limited to the inner suburbs of Melbourne.<sup>244</sup> In a 2011 interview he stated that

[...] even though a lot of people in inner Melbourne were listening to the shows, I kept thinking that no one in Sydney was hearing this stuff. Because I had the record label [Au Go-Go], I was just fanatical about that stuff. I was listening to everything and hearing amazing things from around the world, but I couldn’t afford to put them out.<sup>245</sup>

The cassette magazine’s format solidified quickly over the initial issues. Each issue contained a sleeve with notes designed under the art direction of Michael Trudgeon. Initially, the first issue consisted of paper notes folded around the cassette, slid into a 7” record sleeve. After the debut issue was well received, Trudgeon visited various manufacturers to develop the screen-printed plastic sleeve format used for subsequent issues of the magazine.<sup>246</sup> From the very first issues, guests from international post-punk communities were interviewed, although not simply musicians; *Fast Forward* also featured those involved in the independent music industry, from band managers to

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<sup>243</sup> Milne.

<sup>244</sup> Schaefer.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid.

<sup>246</sup> Milne.

writers. For instance, the magazine's first issue contained a recorded interview with Raff Edmunds, a former manager of New York punk musician Richard Hell. Milne recalls on the incidental manner in which content was collated for the issues:

The first couple of issues its all pretty much stuff that I had access to, I was working for the Missing Link record label so the Go-Betweens and the Birthday Party and the Laughing Clowns feature heavily [...] we're at RRR we're getting those sorts of demos [...] we had other friends who had some labels [...] very quickly, *Fast Forward* took off so quickly that we were getting things from people all around the world.<sup>247</sup>

This included music writer friends from publications such as *Rolling Stone* providing *Fast Forward* with recordings of interviews they had produced.<sup>248</sup> International artists whose recorded interviews featured in the magazine would include The Cure's Robert Smith (issue number eight), UK post-punk band Gang of Four (issue number three), along with John Lydon of the Sex Pistols and Public Image Limited (issue number seven). Retrospectively it can be observed that there was certainly a focus throughout issues of *Fast Forward* to position Australian music within an international context, and the cassette tape format of the magazine allowed for an increased access to music content from prominent post-punk scenes from the UK and the US. Likewise, through the postal distribution network that the cassette enabled, Australian artists that were featured in *Fast Forward* could now find international exposure through the magazine's global following, with distribution through outlets most notably including the UK record store and label Rough Trade.<sup>249</sup>

Notably, local groups that were interviewed in *Fast Forward* following international tours demonstrated in their discussions a feeling of needing to assert themselves internationally as bands, although still spoke positively of the level of activity in

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<sup>247</sup> Ibid.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid.



Australian independent music scenes. For instance, in an interview with The Go-Betweens prior to the release of their debut album, band member Robert Forster can be heard stating: “What I’d like to see first of all, is Australian bands not having to seek approval from England [...]”; to which his band mate Grant McLennan responded: “Robert’s right, it’s not just taking on England, the main thing should be taking on Australia.” These were comments made in light of the band’s own work in the UK during the early 1980s.<sup>250</sup> Such a discussion brings to mind the interests of Australian postmodernist music and visual arts practitioners discussed in the previous chapter, with regard to their criticality surrounding the notion of provincialism.

In assessing this mood retrospectively David Chesworth has expressed a feeling that music recordings and media were not as readily available in Australia as they were abroad. While record stores did carry international post-punk records, and British music press such as *New Musical Express* (or *NME*) was available in Australia, Chesworth reflected that

[...] it seemed like it was all swirl and all happening [abroad], and here there were things happening [...] but] we just didn’t have the size for there to be any kind of groundswell. And to make any impact in any way I think [...] you had to make an impact overseas.<sup>251</sup>

The reach and influence of foreign music press in Australia is something that Milne has commented on further recently, specifying that:

If you walked into any news agency [...] they would have a section of music magazines, and they would always have *Melody Maker*, *Sounds* and *NME*, the three English weeklies, they’d probably also have ones like *Disk Weekly* and there was *Record Mirror*, there was a bunch of other ones [...] you’ve also got

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<sup>250</sup> *Fast Forward*, no. 6, eds. Andrew Maine, Bruce Milne, and Michael Trudgeon (Melbourne: Fast Forward, 1981).

<sup>251</sup> Chesworth, interview by Davis.

to remember they were all coming in surface, so they were always about two or three months behind which was weird [...] but they were big enough and popular enough that people were searching for them.<sup>252</sup>

In the second issue of *Fast Forward*, Australian music journalists Stuart Coupe and Walker (both writing at the time for Sydney rock publications *Tag* and *RAM*) were interviewed regarding the state of music criticism in Australia. Walker, who first gained experience as a self-published fanzine writer, complained of rock journalism in the country being largely “uncritical” and writers acting as “extensions of record company publicity departments.” Coupe similarly complained that: “Most of the critics in this country have got no idea at all,” and writers suffered from the “typical Australian inferiority complex.” While he did not expand on what is meant by this term, it seems to be describing the aforementioned notion of a “cultural cringe,”<sup>253</sup> or the colonial mentality of Australians considering their culture inferior to that which was taking place abroad. Comparing Australian music criticism with that of the US and the UK, Coupe commented that “if you went over there and defended The Angels they’d laugh at you.”<sup>254</sup> While on the one hand this comment is in some ways indicative of a “cultural cringe” in diminishing local Australian music, Coupe’s statement is largely aimed at unsophisticated local music journalists. To Coupe it was local journalists who were in part responsible for propping up less interesting Australian music, at the expense of the musical underground.

This comment aimed at rock band The Angels outlines the binary divide between Melbourne post-punk musicians and the rock music of Australia’s mainstream music industry. Individuals working in this period have commented on the lack of stylistic

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<sup>252</sup> Milne.

<sup>253</sup> Rollo Hesketh, “A.A. Phillips and the ‘Cultural Cringe’: Creating an ‘Australian Tradition’,” *Meanjin* 72, no. 3 (2013), accessed January 4, 2018, <https://meanjin.com.au/essays/a-a-phillips-and-the-cultural-cringe-creating-an-australian-tradition/>.

<sup>254</sup> *Fast Forward*, no. 2, eds. Andrew Maine, Bruce Milne, and Michael Trudgeon (Melbourne: Fast Forward, 1980).

diversity in the Australian musical mainstream.<sup>255</sup> Sometimes this would bring together various underground artists who might not have shared similar concerns aesthetically, but were united on the grounds of their desire to create music operating outside of the aesthetic concerns of the mainstream. This allowed for seemingly disparate artists to share stages despite their musical differences. Chesworth for instance has commented that his group Essendon Airport was accepted at the Crystal Ballroom post-punk venue in St Kilda “very easily” despite their stylistic difference to other bands in that scene. An “us and them” attitude existed between on one hand small communities of stylistically diverse independent musicians, and on the other a commercialised and stylistically homogenous mainstream rock scene.<sup>256</sup>

*Fast Forward* was a platform for detailed profiles on emerging Australian bands. The magazine featured early audio interviews with Australian post-punk groups Equal Local and Laughing Hands, and various other groups including Xero, Scattered Order, Primitive Calculators, The Informatics and Dorian Gray all had music featured in various issues of the magazine. Radio play-styled sketches and humorous segments were also included in issues of *Fast Forward*, with 3RRR radio personality Johnny Topper contributing a somewhat absurdist radio play serial entitled *The Case Of The Missing Leave It To Beaver* over several issues of the cassette magazine.<sup>257</sup>

Issues of *Fast Forward* included conscious discussion of the fact that the technology of the cassette tape was crucial in facilitating the magazine, as well as being of great importance to DIY and post-punk music communities at the time, making the production and distribution of music increasingly accessible. For instance, a *Fast Forward* interview with Bill Furlong of British sound art audio magazine *Audio Arts* was explicit in its discussion of how significant the cassette was for distributing sound recordings that were previously difficult to obtain, and that this had been a driving

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<sup>255</sup> Chesworth, interview by Davis.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid.

<sup>257</sup> *Fast Forward*, no. 1-13, eds. Andrew Maine, Bruce Milne, and Michael Trudgeon (Melbourne: Fast Forward, 1980-1982).

factor in the initiation of *Audio Arts* to distribute sound art recordings. For Furlong, it would have been “totally inadequate and inappropriate” to attempt to encompass the audio and sonic content that *Audio Arts* covered solely in print form.<sup>258</sup> Furlong articulates this in his comment that

by the early ‘70s there were a lot of [cassette player] machines in people’s [...] possession, and this created I suppose an enormous network of people that were able to receive information through the cassette, and [up until that point] the cassette had only really been used in terms of prerecorded music.<sup>259</sup>

The sixth issue of *Fast Forward* cassette magazine contained a printed sleeve guide on DIY cassette practice, instructing readers on how to produce their own cassette releases as musicians or bands.<sup>260</sup> The guide, entitled “CASSETTE-IT-YOURSELF” included tips on dubbing and recording tapes, packaging and inner slips, promotion and advertising (concluding with the suggestion to “Advertise in FAST FORWARD!”) A discussion on working with music distribution companies was covered, with contact details for some Australian distributors included. Even sales tax and copyright for independent artists was discussed. With DIY experimental music and post-punk’s use of cassette media, the exchange-value of music is not foregrounded. Rather for practitioners of the DIY ethos, music’s value is one of “doing it for the love,” and in doing so achieving through DIY music practice a sense of community belonging.

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<sup>258</sup> *Fast Forward*, no. 7, eds. Andrew Maine, Bruce Milne, and Michael Trudgeon (Melbourne: Fast Forward, 1981).

<sup>259</sup> Ibid.

<sup>260</sup> *Fast Forward*, no. 6, eds. Andrew Maine, Bruce Milne, and Michael Trudgeon (Melbourne: Fast Forward, 1981).

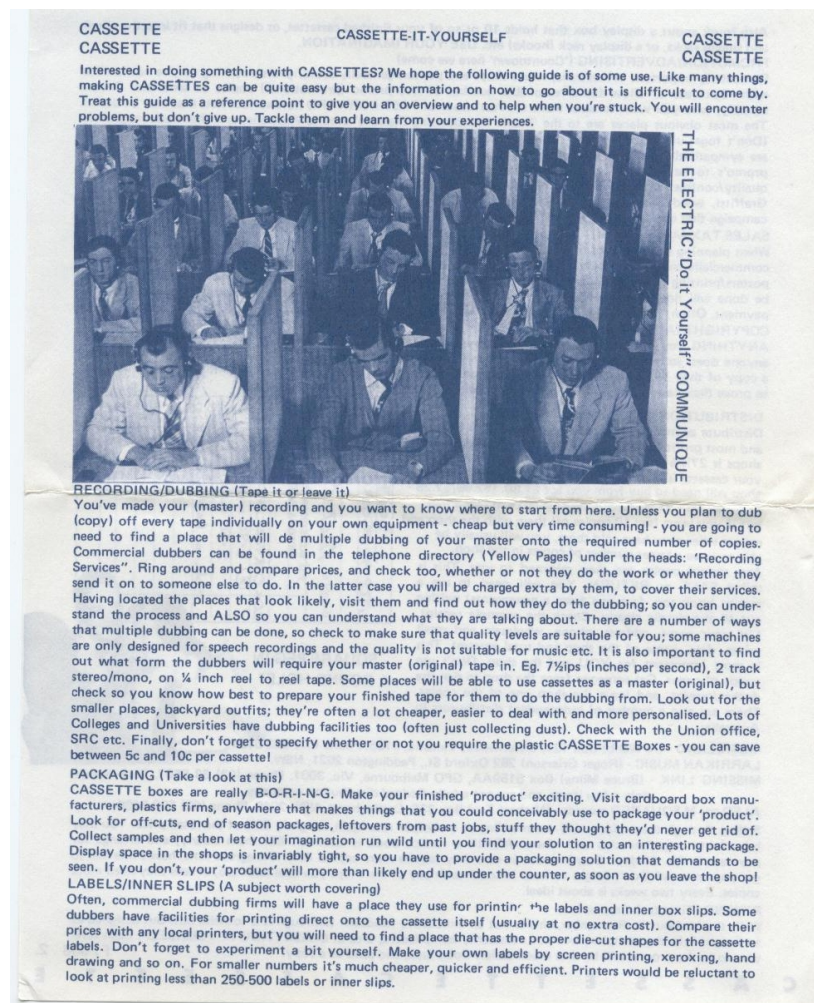


Figure 9. *Fast Forward* issue 6, “CASSETTE-IT-YOURSELF” insert, August 1981.

## Cassette culture as a prescient use of media

The cassette culture, as exemplified by *Fast Forward* cassette magazine in Melbourne, signalled a new shift in the consumption of music, away from that of passive consumption of commoditised contents (records), to a new focus of the platform. In order to bypass the cultural gatekeepers of the recording industry, who, as the criticisms raised above suggest, stifled expressive individualism, post-punk and experimental musicians in Australia as well as internationally forged new ways of using cassette media. This allowed for a productive agency in their engagement with music listening, rather than passive consumption. What media theorist Lev Manovich somewhat schematically attributed to digital media can be seen in its first instances in DIY musicians’ use of the cassette. Manovich noted that:

If the logic of old media corresponded to the logic of industrial mass society, the logic of new [digital] media fits the logic of the postindustrial society, which values individuality over conformity.<sup>261</sup>

With the cassette tape, and the ideological battle mentioned above between the entertainment and electronics industries, we can see the pre-digital emergence of a new post-industrial dynamic involving intellectual property and the consumption of information. This post-industrial valuing of “individuality” raised by Manovich is also of a piece with the logic of neoliberalism. While Manovich’s analysis of media is largely formalist, others have made similar analyses of digital media’s logic that considers its political implications. McKenzie Wark has discussed this recent monopolisation of communication in his 2004 book *A Hacker Manifesto*. In Wark’s post-Marxist analysis, unlike the capitalist class that extracts profit from owning the means of production, in an informational economy, through copyright laws and digital platforms, a new elite class monopolises intellectual property or the means of its distribution. Through ownership of copyrights, patents and trademarks, this new elite that Wark terms the “vectoralist” class controls the relocatable vectors along which information can be distributed and its value reproduced.<sup>262</sup> A present day example of this is Apple Music, in which Apple provides a centralised platform for listeners to pay for access to the intellectual property of artists, major labels, independent labels, as well as the direct communication between fans and musicians via the platform’s Connect function. With this model Apple can be flexible in what it allows users to share, so long as they do so while using Apple’s platforms for sharing.<sup>263</sup>

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<sup>261</sup> Manovich, 41.

<sup>262</sup> Wark, *A Hacker Manifesto*, [032].

<sup>263</sup> Wark’s concept of the “vector” updates Marxist understandings of means of cultural production, and in doing so is inspired by and contributes to the field of cultural studies. Wark claims to draw from post-structuralist philosophers such as Michel Foucault, Jean-François Lyotard and Gilles Deleuze the notion that in Wark’s words, “totality is invariably bad totality, that historicism is invariably false historicism.” When Wark first introduces the concept of the vector, it is largely in discussing the broadcast culture of television, and what he calls “weird global media events” of the late 1980s and early 1990s, such as the fall of the Berlin Wall, the first Gulf War and the Tiananmen Square Massacre. McKenzie Wark, *Virtual Geography: Living with Global Media Events*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994) xi, vii-viii.

With the cassette tape, highlighted by the aforementioned milestone legal case of the Universal vs. Sony “Betamax” case in the mid-1980s, we see a forbear to the intellectual property debates occurring presently in the digital age, and a shifting focus within the music industry to the control of platforms for the sharing of information. While discussed as a legal precedent, the case is more significant when considering it provided the first hints of a coming paradigm shift in the consumption of media. In this case we can observe the old model of Universal’s entertainment industry, which represented the mass production and mass consumption of recorded content, coming head-to-head with an emerging model of Sony’s in the commodification of access to a platform (so that the consumer may themselves become productive). These two models reflect an emergent shift in consumption towards a neoliberal ethos that foregrounds the individualist wants of the consumer. With the cassette tape, we see a realisation of what Hans Magnus Enzensberger foresaw as the potential of broadcast media when he commented:

It is wrong to regard media equipment as mere means of consumption. It is always, in principle, also means of production and, indeed, since it is in the hands of the masses, socialized means of production.<sup>264</sup>

From our contemporary vantage point, the decentralised social networking of cassette culture, exemplified by the *Fast Forward* cassette magazine thus offers a pre-digital precedent for the artist-driven distribution of music via the Internet. As Adam Harper notes: “The networking that ensues from postal relationships between artist and listener, as well as magazines and radio, then becomes a utopian vision of global communion.”<sup>265</sup> If considering that in retrospect the proponents of cassette culture such as those highlighted by *Fast Forward* felt they were participating in a “global

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<sup>264</sup> Enzensberger, 266.

<sup>265</sup> Harper, 152.

communion,” it is hard not to think of the hopes of the nascent World Wide Web as a global community for the sharing of information.

## **Conclusion**

*Fast Forward* cassette magazine was an exemplary example of a DIY initiative that made use of the cassette tape in order to provide opportunities and exposure for independent artists that were recording outside of the major record label system. It developed audiences for those working in music practices that did not fit sonically or contextually within the Australian mainstream. The magazine also made use of underground international distribution networks to provide exposure for Australian artists abroad. *Fast Forward* favoured the DIY ethos and helped provide a platform for individuals regardless of musical background or experience.

The “DIY ethos” that had become the staple of the punk movement was very well represented in the punk and post-punk scenes of Australia. As discussed in the previous chapter, the cultural context for the DIY ethos’ anti-institutional sentiments had direct precedents from the 1960s onwards. These precedents span from the counterculture in the US and globally, reflective also in experimental music practices at the time, to the moment following a period of widespread social unrest in the late 1960s and critiques of mass culture. When punk levelled this critique against dominant and mainstream culture with its music and style, it was the DIY ethos that was its chosen tool for finding agency outside of the dominant economy.

By the beginning of the 1980s, for various post-punk musicians in Melbourne, “the institution” that was being targeted was the cultural homogeneity of Australia’s music industry. One aspect of this institution was the mainstream rock press, for which some of those discussed in this chapter such as Coupe and Walker wrote, although with some critical reservations. Another was the recording industry and major record labels, whose conservative tastes dictated trends in the Australian music mainstream and did not give much attention to the musical diversity of Australia’s independent



underground. As Walker suggested: “It wasn’t so much that they [major record labels] were scared of punk, and rejected it for that reason, it was more that they were totally unaware of it, at least in its Australian incarnation.”<sup>266</sup> In response, a small network of venues supported independent and DIY artists that were outside of Australia’s mainstream rock music scene.

In the mid-to-late 1970s, fanzines were important internationally, and no less in Melbourne, for reviewing and publicising underrepresented independent artists. Fanzines were a platform through which the conceptual underpinnings and key sentiments of the nascent DIY ethos could be expressed and shared via an artist-led network. The increasing quality, affordability and ubiquity of cassette tape technology became crucial for the DIY musician by the early 1980s in putting into action the ideas expressed in these fanzines.

The global post-punk movement as well as “cassette culture” was at the forefront of developing a new “utopian” network that made use of the medium’s potential for the democratisation of music production.<sup>267</sup> Proponents such as Milne of *Fast Forward* cassette magazine took advantage of the increasing affordability of recording and copying music on cassette. Cassette enthusiasts in Melbourne and abroad set up networks via mail, record stores, independent radio and fanzines to promote their own tastes independent of those dictated by the mainstream record industry. Beyond these underground cultures however, the cassette tape’s re-ordering of how the consumer navigated their listening habits was evident. If not producing their own music, a growing trend of “selection taping” and “mix taping” saw listeners finding a

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<sup>266</sup> Walker, *Inner City Sound*, 5.

<sup>267</sup> The notion of technology’s potential to develop a “utopian” network of global cooperation is something deeply rooted in the 1960s US counterculture, as well as its interest in the new possibilities afforded by American research into communications technology of the Cold War period. As communications scholar Fred Turner has noted:

“Although they rejected the military-industrial complex as a whole, as well as the political process that brought it into being, hippies from Manhattan to Haight-Ashbury read Norbert Wiener, Buckminster Fuller, and Marshall McLuhan. Through their writings, young Americans encountered a cybernetic vision of the world, one in which material reality could be imagined as an information system. [...] many thought they could see the possibility of global harmony.” Turner, 4-5.

productive path of consumption, one in which they could assert their individual expression in the selection of tracks to compile on cassettes. Both of these rising trends—musicians doing-it-themselves with regard to music recording and listeners creating personalised mix tapes—were directly enabled by the cassette tape. Furthermore, both of these trends posed existential threats to the music recording industry's status quo in the expensive production (inaccessible for the independent musician) and mass consumption of LPs. What the cassette tape enabled in this sense was arguably an actualisation of Attali's proposition of "composition." As Attali predicted, this growing push towards listeners becoming musicians themselves offered a challenge to what Attali called the "repetitive power" of mass record consumption, in which tastes were driven directly by the major recording labels.

There is a focus on the intention with which musicians produce their work evident in the anti-institutional nature of these Melbourne post-punk DIY practices. Imperative to the intention of musicians discussed was the discouragement of a focus on commercial interests or producing for the "mainstream." As a result certain aesthetics became favourable to these Melbourne post-punk musicians. The "raw" or unpolished aesthetics of punk performance became preferable to the well-produced, technical proficiency of major record label music at the time. A parallel is noticeable here with the aesthetic of "amateurism" discussed in the previous chapter on the Clifton Hill Community Music Centre.

This aesthetic binary is often defined in literature on independent music as one concerning the "authentic" motivations behind the production of independent music, versus the "inauthentic" culture of the mainstream. The following chapter discusses the motivational significance of indie "authenticity" as it pertains to DIY music practices. In the chapter I focus on Melbourne's indie music scene in the early-to-mid 1990s as well as its crossovers with the experimental music community. This was a scene that continued the developments of post-punk fanzine and DIY culture, as well as "cassette culture." Authenticity was expressed aesthetically through unpolished performance and recording, with musical amateurism favoured and the rising

prominence of a term that would come to be a key aesthetic of 1990s indie music: “lo-fi.”

## Chapter Four

### DIY in the 1990s: The Indie Scene, Experimental Music, Indie “Authenticity” and the Lo-Fi Aesthetic

The opening track to the Chapter Music record label’s 1994 compilation *Too Much Ash*—“Fingers In My Eyes” by Perth band Molasses—is at once melodic and shambolic. With a sweet-natured, sing-along pop sensibility, the song features a jangly, slightly overdriven guitar, egg shaker and vocals sung earnestly in unison by the group’s two vocalists. The track’s melodic chorus opens with the charmingly meek lyrics “just don’t get angry, we can work it out,” and its low-fidelity recording captures a performance just delicately hanging together by its threads. Listening to this track, one might feel a sense of nostalgia, and perhaps a tinge of melancholia. It is emotive and expressive music, but warm, welcoming, and self-consciously unpretentious. In the context of the bravado and abrasive rock aggression of 1990s mainstream grunge music, it was groups such as Molasses taking the path of melodic “indie” pop music who exemplified the DIY ethos’ evolution into the 1990s.

In this chapter I examine independent and experimental music practices in Melbourne during the 1990s, as well as Melbourne’s relationship to independent music scenes across the country in Brisbane and Perth. I focus in particular on the Chapter Music and Spill record labels, as well as other independent initiatives working within the same community. Chapter Music, and in particular their early cassette compilations, were exemplary proponents of the “lo-fi” aesthetic in Australia, a key aesthetic topic that I analyse in this chapter. Spill records, in their diverse compilations that featured indie music as well as experimental music artists, represented an important survey of some of the DIY music activities taking place across Australia during the early 1990s. In focusing my research on these initiatives, I analyse indie and DIY music culture’s particular notion of “authenticity,” and the subcultural capital associated with the “lo-fi” aesthetic, as a sonic marker for an “authentic” DIY practice. This indie value system problematises Attali’s sweeping claim that the mass culture of the recording

industry stripped music of both its use-value for listening pleasure and initial ritual function, turning music commodities into pure exchange-value. Contrary to this claim, in this chapter I consider how indie music cultures in Melbourne in fact foregrounded the “ritualistic” element in music production and consumption. Finally, I explore how the self-directed community-building and creative expression evident in Melbourne’s 1990s indie music subcultures was at once viewed as a hard-earned right since the punk movement, but on the other hand was preemptive of the “love your work” ethos that is particularly prevalent in contemporary creative industries such as the arts and fashion.

### **Indie music’s emergence and its historical lineages**

The term “indie” music is short for “independent” music. As Adam Harper has noted, what is considered as indie music has evolved alongside the term. Early independent music literature such as *Op* magazine in the US in the 1980s defined their use of this terminology clearly, stating they would review anything except recordings released on “labels distributed or owned by the entertainment giants (e.g. WEA, CBS, RCA, MCA, WMI).”<sup>268</sup> This position of a binary divide between the mainstream or dominant record industry against more musically progressive artists is in line with Chesworth’s comments discussed in the previous chapter that “it was us and them. [...] there was one other world that existed under the terrain of the mainstream.”<sup>269</sup> By the 1990s however the term “indie” had come to define a diverse genre of its own.<sup>270</sup> Central to the traits that define indie music is a positioning of itself in opposition to the

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<sup>268</sup> Harper, 36-37.

<sup>269</sup> Chesworth, interview by Davis.

<sup>270</sup> For anthropologist Wendy Fonarow, indie music discourse is largely associated with the British music press of the 1980s and early 1990s, such as that of *New Musical Express* (or *NME*, founded 1952), *Melody Maker* (1926-2000, upon merging with *NME*) and *Sounds* (1970-1991). As Harper has noted, this discourse is also evident in US music press such as *Sound Choice* and *Option* (which were both founded in 1984 following the cessation of *Op* magazine, and by individuals involved in the original magazine). Harper, 42. The term “indie,” particularly in the US and Australia, was sometimes used interchangeably with the broader term “alternative.” Wendy Fonarow, “Ask the Indie Professor: Why Do Americans Think They Invented Indie?,” *The Guardian*, July 28, 2011, accessed December 14, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/music/musicblog/2011/jul/28/indie-professor>.

“mainstream,” however further to this anthropologist Wendy Fonarow notes that indie’s values consist of

an espousal of simplicity and austerity, a hypervaluation of childhood and childlike imagery, a nostalgic sensibility, a technophobia, and a fetishization of the guitar.<sup>271</sup>

This quote outlines a number of key traits surrounding indie music. Firstly, the “hypervaluation of childhood” can be interpreted as an extension of a favouring of the “amateur” discussed in previous chapters, along with the trait of being “technophobic.”<sup>272</sup> Moreover, it captures a sense of innocence, of being untainted (at least seemingly) by the commercial imperatives of mainstream music. Finally, some of these traits that Fonarow mentions are recognisably affiliated with the “lo-fi” aesthetic. While something of a blanket term, indie has generally adopted the amateurism that was present in the original punk movement as well as an emphasis on guitars, however it is not necessarily aggressive or loud in its sound. The indie subgenre of “indie pop” in fact has a tendency towards the melodic, eschewing masculine bravado and at times drawing nostalgic inspiration 1960s jangly guitar pop.<sup>273</sup>

In many ways, indie music culture in the 1990s in Australia directly continued on from the development of earlier 1980s DIY music cultures such as post-punk, as well as direct influences from international record labels and stylistic developments overseas. Indie music followed the same model of do-it-yourself (largely cassette) record labels, fanzines and mail distribution networks. The Australian indie record label Toytown has noted for instance the influence of David Nichols’ fanzine *Distant Violins* (Melbourne, first published 1982). Toytown operated from 1988 until 1998 releasing

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<sup>271</sup> Wendy Fonarow, *Empire of Dirt: The Aesthetics and Rituals of British Indie Music* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2006), 39.

<sup>272</sup> Where indie music presented an aversion to the technological as an expression of authenticity, expressed largely through the ‘lo-fi’ aesthetic discussed in this chapter, an interesting point of difference can be found in rave and techno cultures occurring simultaneously in Melbourne, the UK and the US. See Chapter Five.

<sup>273</sup> Fonarow, *Empire of Dirt*, 40-41.

indie pop groups including Crabstick, Blairmail, Stinky Fire Engine and The Cat's Miaow.<sup>274</sup> In turn, Toytown's releases were an initial inspiration in the early days of independent record label Chapter Music. The Triffids, founded in Perth in 1978, were influences on what would go on to be known as "indie."<sup>275</sup> Likewise, Brisbane band The Go-Betweens are often referred to in contemporary music press as an "indie" band, despite being founded in 1977.<sup>276</sup> The New Zealand record label Flying Nun, founded in 1981, greatly influenced indie musicians internationally in years to come. While the label began in Christchurch, it is best known for its signees from Dunedin such as The Chills, The Clean and The Verlaines, whose jangly breed of guitar pop came to be defined as the "Dunedin Sound."<sup>277</sup> In 1986 *NME* magazine released a compilation cassette titled *C86*, featuring UK bands such as The Pastels, Primal Scream and The Wedding Present. This compilation has been regarded as a defining influence on "indie" as a genre.<sup>278</sup>

### **The history of Chapter Music**

Chapter Music is a record label based in Melbourne and run by Guy Blackman and Ben O'Connor. The label was founded by Blackman in Perth in 1992, and began its life as a fanzine dedicated to Syd Barrett, the original bandleader of British rock band Pink Floyd. Blackman has noted he was first drawn to fanzine culture through an interest in science fiction and its zines;<sup>279</sup> an interesting aside given, as mentioned in Chapter Three, the term "fanzine" is first credited to science fiction fans of the 1950s. Blackman's *Chapter 24* fanzine (named after a Pink Floyd song) included material

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<sup>274</sup> Toytown, "About | Toytown," accessed June 23, 2016, <https://toytownmusic.wordpress.com/about/>.

<sup>275</sup> Wilson Neate, "The Days of the Triffids: A Retrospective with Graham Lee and Rob McComb," *Perfect Sound Forever*, May, 2006, accessed January 5, 2018, <http://www.furious.com/perfect/triffids.html>.

<sup>276</sup> James Sullivan, "The Go-Betweens' McLennan Dies at 48," *Rolling Stone*, May 8, 2006, accessed January 12, 2018, <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/the-go-betweenes-mclennan-dies-at-48-20060508>.

<sup>277</sup> Martin Aston, "Nuns at the Altar of Rock," Music, *The Guardian*, Friday May 15, 2009, accessed January 10, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2009/may/15/flying-nun-indie-rough-trade>.

John Ferguson, "Flying Nun Still Airborne After 21 Years," *Billboard* 114, no. 17 (April 2002): 53.

<sup>278</sup> Fonarow, *Empire of Dirt*, 41.

<sup>279</sup> Guy Blackman and Ben O'Connor, interview by Jared Davis, Melbourne, May 23, 2016, audio recording.

dedicated to Barrett along with other band interviews, record reviews and poetry. After releasing three 10-page long photocopied issues, Blackman decided to include a cassette compilation of Perth bands for his fourth issue. While that fourth issue of the fanzine never eventuated, the cassette compilation did, and was released in June 1992 entitled *Bright Lights, Small City* as “A Chapter 24 compilation.” The title was presumably a reference to Perth, a self-consciously small and remote city known as the “city of light” after residents turned on their lights for astronaut John Glenn, as he became the first American to enter the earth’s orbit in 1962.<sup>280</sup> From The Same Mother, a record label founded by musician Julian Williams in Perth, was a formative influence for Blackman. The label released their first compilation cassette in 1990 titled *Nuns In Adidas Footwear* documenting the Perth underground, and Blackman has noted that the label was a “huge inspiration” for the aforementioned *Bright Lights, Small City* compilation.<sup>281</sup> Blackman’s following release, a tribute compilation to New York alternative guitar rock band Sonic Youth entitled *Kill Yr Idols* was released on cassette the following year in 1993 under the shortened label name “Chapter.”<sup>282</sup> Soon after Blackman produced four issues of a fanzine titled *Salty & Delicious* with Richard Forster, who co-ran Chapter with Blackman between 1993 and 1995. Cassette compilations *Too Much Ash* and *Asparagus Milkshake* (both 1994) were released to accompany issues of the zine.<sup>283</sup> In 1995 Blackman moved to Melbourne, where Chapter Music has been operating from ever since. O’Connor became co-director of the label in 2007, although he had been assisting with the label since the mid-1990s soon after Blackman moved to Melbourne.<sup>284</sup>

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<sup>280</sup> Western Australian Museum, “City of Light - 50 Years in Space,” Western Australian Museum, accessed December 14, 2017, <http://museum.wa.gov.au/city-lights>.

<sup>281</sup> Faster Louder, “Chapter Music: 6 Labels That Inspired Us,” *Faster Louder*, November 14, 2013, accessed January 10, 2018, <http://fasterlouder.junkee.com/chapter-music-6-labels-that-inspired-us/834567>.

<sup>282</sup> Blackman has noted that a record label already existed under the name Chapter 22, being too similar to his previous Syd Barrett-related title. Tone Deaf, “Inside One of Australia’s Longest Running Indie Record Labels,” *Tone Deaf*, July 22, 2015, accessed June 23, 2016, <http://www.tonedead.com.au/454366/inside-one-of-australias-longest-running-indie-record-labels.htm>.

<sup>283</sup> Various, *Too Much Ash*, Chapter Music CH6, 2009, CD-R compilation reissue, liner notes.

Various, *Asparagus Milkshake*, Chapter Music CH8, 2009, CD-R compilation reissue, liner notes.

<sup>284</sup> Ryan Saar, “From Zine to No Zu: 24 Years of Chapter Music,” *Rolling Stone*, March 1, 2016, accessed 23 June, 2016, <http://rollingstoneaus.com/music/post/chapter-music-retrospective/3282>.



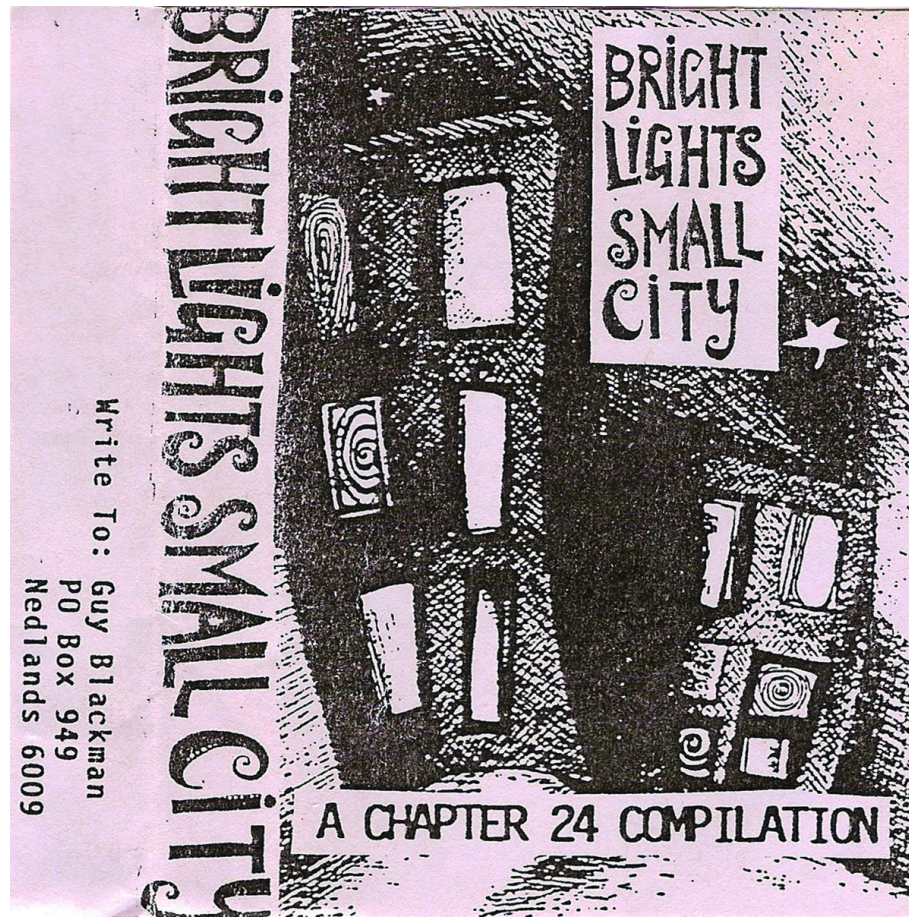


Figure 10. *Bright Lights Small City*, “A Chapter 24 Compilation,” 1992. Cover art by Carly Nasso.

Mail order catalogues were an important means of distribution for the nascent Australian DIY indie music scene, where information was otherwise scarce. The other important factor was community radio. Blackman had previously been involved in Perth station RTR, and in discussing community radio exposure in Melbourne, O’Connor recalls that

[there was only] one show on RRR that played that kind of stuff [DIY indie music], *Witch In The Colours* which was Jason Reynolds’ show, who also ran a label, called Summershine [...], and then there was two shows on PBS, and I think through them I probably found out about the mail order catalogues.<sup>285</sup>

<sup>285</sup> Blackman and O’Connor.

The Summershine record label mentioned here released local indie bands as well as international acts, operating as a Melbourne connection to the wider international indie music communities. Summershine released records by local Melbourne indie pop band The Sugargliders, who had also released music on renowned Bristol indie label Sarah Records, alongside international acts such as Washington DC band Velocity Girl.<sup>286</sup> Mail orders would provide access to international releases and communities. For instance, Blackman comments that he was in contact with the Chicago mail order and record label Ajax, who released material by the Australian band The Cannanes. However, despite the international attention that The Cannanes in particular received, Blackman notes that communication between scenes in Australia and the US prior to the Internet was generally a “one way street.”<sup>287</sup>

Blackman has commented that a “love triangle” existed between Perth, Brisbane and Melbourne, with many musicians ultimately moving to the latter.<sup>288</sup> The appeal of Melbourne for many musicians was due to its live music ecosystem. A sample of music listings taken in 1994 demonstrates Melbourne’s live music scene was listing more gigs and music venues in the early-to-mid 1990s than the comparable independent music destination of Sydney. While the difference was not vast (511 gigs listed in Melbourne in one week to Sydney’s 469), more significant was the concentration of venues. Where on average a distance between gigs in Sydney was 414 metres, Melbourne’s highly concentrated ecosystem of venues boasted an average closeness of 189 metres.<sup>289</sup>

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<sup>286</sup> Faster Louder, “Chapter Music: 6 Labels That Inspired Us.” Discogs, “Summershine,” CDs and Vinyl at Discogs, accessed January 10, 2018, <https://www.discogs.com/label/24284-Summershine>.

<sup>287</sup> Blackman and O’Connor.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid.

<sup>289</sup> Sarah Taylor, “Lost Venues, Long Nights: An Introduction to Historical Maps of Live Music in Sydney and Melbourne,” *Cordite Poetry Review*, 1 February, 2015, accessed 22 September, 2017, <http://cordite.org.au/essays/lost-venues-long-nights/>.

The beginning of the 1990s in Melbourne saw a political situation that was favourable for the development of nightlife, beyond live music and into bars and licensed venues more generally. In previous chapters I have discussed the ongoing effects of the more socially progressive Whitlam Federal Government and even the Hamer State Liberal Party Government in Victoria; the effects of this climate continued into the beginning of the 1990s. Australia had been led by Federal Labor governments throughout the 1980s, first under Prime Minister Bob Hawke from 1983, then under Paul Keating, Hawke's former Deputy, after a leadership challenge in 1991.<sup>290</sup> In Victoria, Labor held State Government under John Cain from 1982 until 1990, and then for two more years under Joan Kirner.<sup>291</sup> In 1984, the Cain Government commissioned a review into the state's stringent liquor licensing regulations. The Nieuwenhuysen Review—named after University of Melbourne economics reader Dr John Nieuwenhuysen who led the review—was delivered in 1986. After adopting a majority of the review's recommendations, Victoria's liquor licensing laws became the most relaxed in the country, creating a climate that was conducive to nightlife. Following a recession at the beginning of the 1990s that had left many inner city lots vacant, Melbourne City Council encouraged young people to set up businesses including small bars. They did so through grants and increasing the ease of obtaining permits. The State Liberal Government under Premier Jeff Kennett, elected in 1992, also had a large effect on commercial development in Melbourne and subsequently its nightlife. The Kennett Government passed further amendments to liquor licensing in 1994, essentially to serve the soon-to-open Crown Casino and permit its numerous small bars to trade without serving food. This had a flow-on effect on Melbourne's nightlife allowing new

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<sup>290</sup> Gabrielle Chan, "Bob Hawke Looks Back: Former PM on His Feud with Keating, Leadership and Reform," Australian politics, *The Guardian*, Friday January 1, 2016, accessed January 12, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/jan/01/bob-hawke-looks-back-former-pm-on-his-feud-with-keating-leadership-and-reform>.

<sup>291</sup> Geoffrey Robinson, "Joan Kirner, a Pioneering Leader for the Left as Well as Women," *The Conversation*, June 2, 2015, accessed February 6, 2018, <https://theconversation.com/joan-kirner-a-pioneering-leader-for-the-left-as-well-as-women-42639>.

small bars without kitchens to open in the inner city and its various laneways, bars that Melbourne remains known for at the time of writing.<sup>292</sup>

Geography and a sense of periphery informed Melbourne indie music initiatives. Not simply a sense of periphery between Australia and indie music scenes in the US and the UK, but also between artists from Perth and Brisbane to Melbourne. Regarding Perth's geographic location, Blackman has commented that:

One of the initial ideas that drove Chapter was the idea that being from Perth no one was paying any attention, so you could just do things for your friends or for a smaller circle and it was [...] a supportive insular network, where you didn't have to look for approval from outside sources.<sup>293</sup>

The outside sources that Blackman refers to here are the music industry and an external audience of consumers. O'Connor clarifies that what is significant here is a "separation from industry."<sup>294</sup> As Melbourne and Sydney were generally home at the time to more established independent record labels, musicians might have made decisions according to what they felt would be appealing to the tastes of more established record labels, or the audiences of these labels. O'Connor specifically has noted that for him, the practices that at the time seemed to espouse a "real DIY" ethos were taking place for this reason in the peripheral communities of Perth and Brisbane, rather than his hometown of Melbourne.<sup>295</sup> In place of external commercial interests, the practitioners of this DIY indie practice developed their own sub-economies, using cheaply accessible recording means to enable this. This notion of peripheral practices again relates to discussions raised in prior chapters regarding provincialism and the local in Australian music practices. In the indie and DIY music cultures discussed in

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<sup>292</sup> Michael Harden, "Unique and Deplorable: Regulating Drinking in Victoria," *Meanjin* 69, no. 3 (2010), accessed February 1, 2018, <https://meanjin.com.au/essays/unique-and-deplorable-regulating-drinking-in-victoria/>.

<sup>293</sup> Blackman and O'Connor.

<sup>294</sup> Ibid.

<sup>295</sup> Ibid.

this chapter, musicians do not necessarily just identify the notion of provincialism as a problematic state of mind—but rather ascribe directly a particular kind of subcultural capital to those who are outside the “rules of the game” as Terry Smith would claim.<sup>296</sup> This is what is meant by O’Connor’s mention of the significance of a “separation from industry.”<sup>297</sup> With this in mind, attention to the peripheral is not only an attention to the Australian versus the international, but even a valuing of sites peripheral to Australia’s national music industry hubs of Sydney and Melbourne.

### **The history of Spill label**

Co-founder of Melbourne via Brisbane independent record label Spill, Greg Wadley, offers a similar sentiment to Blackman and O’Connor’s in discussing the Brisbane music scene. Wadley notes that “in Brisbane, there was no hope of ever being any kind of public figure, and no real desire to be one either.”<sup>298</sup> This is a position that emerges from the cultural conservatism at the time of Brisbane, as well as Perth for that matter, in which by contrast Melbourne was for artists and musicians far more sophisticated.<sup>299</sup>

Spill label was founded by a contingent of Brisbane artists in order to create a central point of contact for the records that they were producing independently at the time. Since the early 1990s, Wadley has been primarily responsible for running the label, which he initially co-founded with his brother, musician Ian Wadley, and moved its operations to Melbourne in the early 1990s. Of this move to Melbourne, Greg Wadley has noted that there were two notable waves of musicians relocating from Brisbane. Firstly, in the early 1980s to Sydney, in no small part due to the hostile culture directed at musicians and artists during the very conservative years of Queensland Premier Joh Bjelke-Petersen’s government. Secondly, to Melbourne during the early 1990s, citing

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<sup>296</sup> Smith, 135.

<sup>297</sup> Blackman and O’Connor.

<sup>298</sup> Greg Wadley, interview by Jared Davis, Melbourne, July 1, 2016, audio recording.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid.

again a greater ease of living in Melbourne for post-punk, indie and experimental musicians. This is largely a consequence of the greater number of live music venues in Sydney and particularly Melbourne by the 1990s, and furthermore the willingness of these venues and their audiences to accommodate such music.<sup>300</sup> Spill label's first official release came in the form of a cassette compilation released in 1992. A total of three Spill Compilations were released, each including a mix of experimental music artists alongside indie bands. Spill was an early label to adopt the CD format in the experimental and indie music scene, with the second compilation in 1993 arriving on the new format.<sup>301</sup> Nonetheless, despite the new digital format, a vast majority of the music featured on the compilation was audibly recorded on tape with a "lo-fi" aesthetic.

The rise and mainstream success of "grunge" music in the early 1990s complicated the relationship between the subcultural ethos of independent music and its antagonistic position towards the mainstream. Grunge was a guitar-oriented form of rock music emerging most prominently out of US indie music scenes with Seattle band Nirvana as its undeniable mainstream figurehead.<sup>302</sup> While US bands affiliated with the Seattle scene solidified the popular image of grunge, Australian independent rock bands of the 1980s had a seminal influence on these American groups. Bands including Grong Grong (formed 1983, Adelaide), Beasts of Bourbon (formed 1983, Sydney), The Scientists (initially formed 1979 in Perth, then reformed in Sydney in 1981) and the Cosmic Psychos (formed 1977, Melbourne) were noted influences on the sound of the early 1990s Seattle scene.<sup>303</sup> The term "grunge" itself in fact was used to describe these Australian bands in the 1980s prior to its adoption in the US.<sup>304</sup> As noted also in the previous chapter, the seminal Seattle independent record label most affiliated with

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<sup>300</sup> Ibid.

<sup>301</sup> Spill Label, "Spill Compilation Two," Spill Label, accessed January 5, 2018, <http://spill-label.org/spill2.php>.

<sup>302</sup> Sara Marcus, *Girls to the Front: The True Story of the Riot Grrrl Revolution* (New York: HarperPerennial, 2010), 50.

<sup>303</sup> Michael Dwyer, "Grunge City," Entertainment, *The Age*, Wednesday February 23, 2005, accessed 14 December, 2017, <http://www.theage.com.au/news/Music/Grunge-city/2005/02/22/1109046915743.html>.

<sup>304</sup> Everett True, "No End in Sight: Mudhoney Is Alive and Well," *The Stranger*, January 18, 2001, accessed December 14, 2017, <https://www.thestranger.com/seattle/no-end-in-sight/Content?oid=6267>].

grunge, Sub Pop, was directly inspired through its founder Bruce Pavitt by *Fast Forward* cassette magazine.

Wadley has stated that the popular success of grunge in the 1990s highlighted differences between the generational ideals of the 1980s and 1990s independent music scenes.<sup>305</sup> Considering his involvement in the 1980s post-punk community, Wadley notes there was by contrast in the 1990s a return of the countercultural idealism of the 1960s.<sup>306</sup> This countercultural current is an ethos that the prior punk and post-punk generation had denied or outright opposed. Furthermore Wadley observed an increasing acceptance of American cultural influence, as opposed to the post-punk generation discussed in the previous chapter who largely looked towards the UK for their influences. Wadley comments on this:

I felt as though, here was a generation of people who'd grown up on their parents', you know, Woodstock album [...] and looked out on the pop music of their day and saw [...] bad Duran Duran songs [...] and thought "*that's* not music, I wanna play music like mum and dad's record collection." Which is like guitar music, with drums, and long hair. [...] And then grunge came along and it just seemed like [...] this whole new generation just appeared in music, that in some ways was superficially similar to us oldies, but in other ways were utterly different. They seemed to me to be very careerist, in a way that we had never been, [...] they would talk about being rockstars and things like that [...] there just seemed to be a different attitude [...] and to America, we hated America, the '90s kids loved America [...]"<sup>307</sup>

This last comment regarding American culture is targeted towards American popular culture as it related to grunge music, and its revival of the bravado of the "rock star." This a marked contrast to punk's renowned skepticism of the establishment rock

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<sup>305</sup> Wadley.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid.

<sup>307</sup> Ibid.

musician, or more specifically, the commercialism associated with rock stardom.<sup>308</sup> Although, as discussed in previous chapters, aspects of American underground music culture stemming from the garage rock of the 1960s did indeed permeate the Australian and English independent music scenes. In mainstream grunge music there is an evident co-optation by the dominant music industry of the language of rebellion, expressive individualism and DIY entrepreneurialism of both the 1960s counterculture as well as in some senses from the punk and post-punk movements. However, the subcultural resistance of punk to dominant record label culture was ceded on the part of the musicians, with the stylistic language of 1960s and 1970s rock stars being referenced by grunge musicians too. Grunge music can therefore be understood in part as a cooptation of specific subcultures (punk, post-punk and indie music) by the mainstream. At the same time, grunge's mainstream success represents a more effective effort on part of the mainstream recording industry to incorporate independent music practices more broadly. This is reflective of comments made by Bruce Milne on the differing landscape of the 1980s and 1990s music industries, that "there was two different worlds, and that certainly changed dramatically in the early '90s, where the two sort of seemed to melt together."<sup>309</sup> Where in the 1980s there was little attention paid from commercial radio and mainstream record labels to post-punk and independent music culture, this had certainly changed by the era of grunge.

### **The "lo-fi" aesthetics of indie music and its relation to "authenticity"**

Compilations by the aforementioned Spill record label included a mix of experimental musicians alongside indie bands. The first Spill compilation opened with a track from Melbourne experimental band Volvox, featuring Lester Vat (an alias of experimental poet and musician Antony Riddell), along with noise musician Glenn Normann and Dave Taskas (formerly of the band band Grong Grong).<sup>310</sup> The track features Riddell's

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<sup>308</sup> Frith, 158-163.

<sup>309</sup> Milne.

<sup>310</sup> Liquid Architecture, "Anthony Riddell: on the Surface of the Brain," Liquid Architecture, accessed December 14, 2017, <http://www.liquidarchitecture.org.au/program/antony-riddell/>.



highly explosive vocal outbursts, recorded in a low fidelity manner that is often distorted, alongside obscure noises and throbbing sounds that are recorded to pan between the left and right speakers. In contrast to Volvox's freeform experimentalism, a track contributed to the compilation by Brisbane group Wondrous Fair (featuring former members of another prominent underground Brisbane group, Tangled Shoelaces) is a melodic indie pop song. The band approaches the more conventional pop format with a playful informality, in which the group's vocalist occasionally switches from his natural singing voice into a childlike falsetto. Meanwhile, Melbourne band Crabstick's contribution to the Spill compilation is a lo-fi piece of indie rock, featuring strummed acoustic guitar, heavily distorted electric guitar, and vocals. The vocals are recorded low in the mix and sung with a certain emotive frailty that is almost overpowered by the track's heavy emphasis on guitars.

What links the above three examples, while stylistically diverse, is a shared adherence to an aesthetic of amateurism. This is expressed either in performance style, or through recording technique, in what has come to be termed the "lo-fi" aesthetic. Likewise, in the "Chapter 24" *Bright Lights, Small City* compilation mentioned earlier, "Dough Eyed" by Perth band Mustang! (who would later move to Melbourne in 1994 and form the group Doublechin)<sup>311</sup> features a distinctly "lo-fi" aesthetic. The recording of the group's instruments is done in such a manner that certain sounds become lost in the mix. Most noticeably the band's drum kit is overwhelmed by the sounds of distorted guitars. The recording of the track's lead vocals is mixed lower than is conventional for studio rock recordings of the time, and there are imperfections and muffling effects in the recording, likely as a result of the lead singer performing too close to the microphone. These imperfections however are not considered undesirable, but rather a sonic quality such as that which has been described by the likes of musicologist and rock critic Simon Frith as "raw."<sup>312</sup> The intention, one can gather, is to capture enough sonic information to maintain the essence of the song, but to uphold the uninhibited

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<sup>311</sup> Chapter Music, *Asparagus Milkshake*, liner notes.

<sup>312</sup> Frith, 158.

energy of a live performance. Having a “perfect” studio recording that might be offered by the recording artists of major labels was not in the interests of groups whose credibility and sense of value was derived from maintaining an independence from this record label model. I would like to discuss how, certainly by the 1990s, the lo-fi “rawness” had become not only a byproduct of the DIY recording process, but a distinguishable aesthetic, and to the artists that participated in it, a familiar one. “Lo-fi” became a subgenre of sorts centred on an aesthetic of “rawness”; this was a logical extension of a fetish for the unpolished that predated the first wave of UK punk in fact. On this point Frith has noted that the “unmediated” emotion of more raw aesthetics had become a rock ‘n’ roll “convention” with its roots in the American garage rock bands of the 1960s.<sup>313</sup> The Stooges, emerging in 1967, clearly embodied this tendency, with a reference to “rawness” in the title of their 1973 album *Raw Power*.<sup>314</sup>

The “lo-fi” aesthetic in indie music can be understood as the result of imperfections in recording quality, as well as imperfections in a musician’s recorded performance. Harper defines lo-fi’s “phonographic imperfections” as including the hiss of a magnetic tape, distortion, effects caused by fluctuations in a tape’s playback speed, dropouts of signal, the rumble of a cassette recorder’s motor, background noise and line hum.<sup>315</sup> While these characteristics were often considered undesirable by studio recordists and even independent punk musicians for fear that poor recording can detract from the intensity of the performance,<sup>316</sup> Harper has commented that lo-fi aesthetics “reappropriated the prestige that once belonged to hi-fi.”<sup>317</sup> A formative moment of this re-appropriation occurred during the late 1980s and early 1990s, in which a movement of indie rock musicians began to consciously employ the lo-fi aesthetic. This occurred prominently in the US, with American independent rock press

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<sup>313</sup> Ibid., 159.

<sup>314</sup> Iggy And the Stooges, *Raw Power*, Columbia KD 32111, 1973, LP vinyl record.

<sup>315</sup> Harper, 18-24.

<sup>316</sup> Ibid., 117-124.

<sup>317</sup> Ibid., 62.

adopting the term by the end of the 1980s, as well as the legacy of the Olympia, Washington proto “lo-fi” band Beat Happening.<sup>318</sup>

For Harper, where studio recording technology and technical proficiency in performance came to signify the privileges of the dominant class and aspirations of the “mainstream,” lo-fi’s decrease in technical proficiency acted as a subcultural disavowal of mainstream interests.<sup>319</sup> While a “raw” aesthetic being seen as a positive trait is evident in fanzine literature in the 1980s, the conscious discourse surrounding this “lo-fi” aesthetic and naming it as such was most prominent by the 1990s.<sup>320</sup> Kim-Cohen observes that the “sonic artifacts” or imperfections of the lo-fi aesthetic

are understood by listeners as signs, as constituent elements in a complex symbolic grid of sound recording. In each case they may indicate different things. History, intention, and legend are also part of the symbolic grid.<sup>321</sup>

Therefore, Kim-Cohen comments that in listening to recorded music one is engaging not only with the recorded music, voice, or words, but also the “expanded *situation*” of the recording.<sup>322</sup> The lo-fi aesthetic in indie music thus reflects the self-awareness of DIY musicians on their recordings’ expanded situations and symbolic characteristics. Notable proponents of this lo-fi indie sound include Beat Happening, Guided By Voices, Pavement and Sebadoh in the US. In Australia, some of the bands affiliated with the early years of record label Chapter Music adopted the lo-fi aesthetic, particularly those featured on their *Bright Lights, Small City* (1992), *Too Much Ash* (1994) and *Asparagus Milkshake* (1994) compilation cassettes.

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<sup>318</sup> Ibid., 246-247.

<sup>319</sup> Ibid., 13-14.

<sup>320</sup> Ibid., 13-14, 43-49.

<sup>321</sup> Kim-Cohen, 103. “Symbolic grid” is a term that Kim-Cohen uses here after media theorist Friedrich Kittler, to denote the “mediated grid of signs” that the real must pass through in order to be received. Kim-Cohen notes that for instance “Language is such a grid.” Ibid., 95.

<sup>322</sup> Ibid., 104.



Figure 11. *Too Much Ash*, Chapter Music compilation, 1994. Cover art by Nick Potter.

Harper further discusses how lo-fi as an aesthetic choice is often conflated with the DIY ethos in music distribution. While the two are related, the DIY movement in music dates back earlier, after which lo-fi became a badge of independent music's perceived DIY "authenticity" by the 1990s.<sup>323</sup> Lo-fi and amateur aesthetics became a sonic signifier for independence from the dominant, major record label economy and its debased distribution economy, namely commercial radio. These aesthetics were a sonic badge of authenticity, or a form of what Sarah Thornton has called "subcultural capital." As subcultural capital, the lo-fi aesthetic might be chosen by artists as a signifier of an "authentic" taste, rather than out of necessity due to the economic

<sup>323</sup> Harper., 117-118.

conditions of its authorship.<sup>324</sup> Blackman states: “The accessibility of [the lo-fi aesthetic] was like the political underpinning of it, but then it became like you actually preferred [the sound of it].”<sup>325</sup> “Political” in this sense implies the anti-industry ethos of practitioners concerned with authentic musical self-expression. Where the lo-fi qualities of recordings were sometimes incidental sonic markers of this DIY recording process, they became coded as a distinct stylistic trait. O’Connor notes that for proponents of lo-fi at the time, the aesthetic sounded “authentically made by a human being” and was about the “real and authentic and this real human connection.”<sup>326</sup> A human quality and “warmth” is also an aesthetic associated with other analogue recording technologies such as vinyl records—technologies being phased out during the 1990s in favour of CDs.<sup>327</sup> Essentially, the indie notion of “authenticity” favoured localised communities and discouraged engagement with the music industry. Therefore, the lo-fi aesthetic became a preferred style by way of its being synonymous with DIY music practices separate from commercial interests.

The notion of “authenticity” as it appears here is a concept that has been prominent in creative practices since as far back as 19th century Romantic literature. English literature scholars Tim Milnes and Kerry Sinanan have discussed that to understand the Romantic period’s preoccupation with “authenticity” once must consider how its emergence followed the explosion of printed media. This is an observation that again relates to my underlying central arguments surrounding artists’ new ways of using media. The increasing availability of printed matter—and likewise a widening field of authors—contributed to an emphasis on the self and the individual, and new interest in the sincere expressions of the authors and readers of such matter.<sup>328</sup> This discussion echoes philosopher and cultural critic Walter Benjamin’s comments on the printing

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<sup>324</sup> Thornton, 11.

<sup>325</sup> Blackman and O’Connor.

<sup>326</sup> Ibid.

<sup>327</sup> Mark Richardson, “Does Vinyl Really Sound Better?,” *The Pitch*, *Pitchfork*, July 29, 2013, accessed February 13, 2018, <https://pitchfork.com/thepitch/29-does-vinyl-really-sound-better/>.

<sup>328</sup> Tim Milnes and Kerry Sinanan, “Introduction,” in *Romanticism, Sincerity and Authenticity*, eds. Tim Milnes and Kerry Sinanan (UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), eBook collection (ProQuest Ebook Central), 2.

press, with its democratising effect on public debate and the expression of personal opinion. Benjamin notes that “an increasing number of readers became writers,” a tendency that began with the “letters to the editor” column of newspapers.<sup>329</sup> In Romantic literature, the “sincerity” with which writing was expressed is bound up with its “authenticity.” As Milnes and Sinanan explain:

Allied to this concern was a desire to discover a holistic self at the heart of writing, a hub at which the *meaning* of a word might be connected with the *truth* of an intention. Thus, it is in Romantic literature and thought that ‘sincerity’ and ‘authenticity’ are fused – and thereby transformed – for the first time.<sup>330</sup>

Milnes and Sinanan further note that the Oxford English Dictionary observe in the early 19th century a declining use of the word “authentic” to apply to an original object, and rather to define something that is traceable to an original object. Thus during the 19th century “an authentic thing is becoming less a prototypical or original thing, and more a *genuine* thing, that is, something that really proceeds from its origin.”<sup>331</sup> This sentiment perfectly matches that of O’Connor’s in discussing the lo-fi aesthetic of indie music. While a recorded piece of music might be in substitute to a physical performance (the original), the imperfections in its aesthetic nonetheless signified an object that had within it a “real human connection” to its author of origin, and sounded “authentically made by a human being” (or “genuine”).

Further to this, the acceptance of the lo-fi aesthetic helped in developing a sense of agency in DIY practice. As Blackman notes:

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<sup>329</sup> Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, eds. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 742.

<sup>330</sup> Milnes and Sinanan, 2.

<sup>331</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

It validated what we could do as kids [...] at home, and turned it into something that to our minds was just as valid as something that someone overseas or someone on a record label with a big budget could do.<sup>332</sup>

This sentiment is a continued extension of the DIY ethos since the first waves of punk. Crucially, it involves a sidestepping of major record labels—whether by choice or by access—and seeking to work against the major record labels’ determination of tastes. For this reason, at the height of grunge music’s mainstream popularity, indie at times took a different route aesthetically, opting against the aggressive masculine bravado of grunge in favour of more melodic pop. As O’Connor notes: “To me [‘indie pop’ musicians] seemed like a real punk thing [...] making the most of your resources and doing-it-yourself.”<sup>333</sup> While grunge may have been closer to the abrasive energy of punk’s first wave, it was indie musicians making pop music that most closely embodied their DIY ethos.

An overtly masculine tendency in both representation and aesthetics within punk music communities began to be challenged during the 1990s. O’Connor has noted for instance a personal affinity towards the feminist punk “riot grrrl” movement, which emerged first in the US at the beginning of the 1990s. In a recent interview O’Connor comments that riot grrrl had a “huge impact on the way I thought about and listened to music. It was a revulsion of straight white male culture.”<sup>334</sup> It must be noted that the indie bands discussed above, affiliated with Chapter Music, typically had a more diverse representation in terms of female and queer band members than prior case studies in my thesis. I examine the ongoing influence of riot grrrl as well as issues of gender and queer representation within DIY music communities in further detail in the following chapter.

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<sup>332</sup> Blackman and O’Connor.

<sup>333</sup> Ibid.

<sup>334</sup> Saar.

## Cultural shifts foreshadowed by indie “authenticity”

For indie musicians, “authentic” music is that which is separated from economic interests, as market concerns inevitably hinder the sincere expression of the individual. This is affirmed by considering the concept of “credibility” in indie music. As Fonarow notes:

Authenticity’s sister concept in the world of music is credibility. Credibility, or “cred,” is the cultural capital of the music world. Credibility is not how much money one has or how many records one has sold but the respect and honorific status one is accorded in the community.<sup>335</sup>

This concept in other words is akin to Thornton’s concept of “subcultural capital.” For the Australian practitioners of indie music discussed in this chapter, credibility is not defined by the commercial success that is important to dominant economies, but rather one’s “authentic” intentions. Commercial success can in fact be a hindrance to this credibility. The accusation of “selling out” is never far away.

The value that indie music ascribes to practices removed from commodification shares a kinship to the arguments of German philosopher and sociologist Theodor Adorno. Writing in 1938, Adorno critiqued the mass culture and music industries of his time, commenting on a growing “fetish character” in music. Giving the examples of Toscanini as well as jitterbug jazz, Adorno suggested music had become a commodity that consumers do not listen to deeply or critically. Rather, the “consumer is really worshipping the money that he himself has paid for the ticket to the Toscanini concert.”<sup>336</sup> For Adorno, in Marxist terms this is exchange-value destroying the use-value of music. This position was later adopted by Attali regarding mass record

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<sup>335</sup> Fonarow, *Empire of Dirt*, 189.

<sup>336</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, “On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening,” in *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 38.



production's "silencing" of consumers.<sup>337</sup> Adorno also noted the significance of media on music distribution and its effects on listening: "Regressive listening is tied to production by the machinery of distribution, and particularly by advertising."<sup>338</sup> One can assume Adorno's comments on the technology of "mass communications"<sup>339</sup> also refer to the commercial radio of the time. Unlike Attali's call for the masses to make music themselves, Adorno sees in high Modernism a solution to commodity fetishism. He ascribes to composers such as Arnold Schoenberg the ability to enlighten listeners regarding mass music's destruction of individualism. Or in his words, to form "a single dialogue with the powers which destroy individuality – powers whose 'formless shadows' fall gigantically on their music."<sup>340</sup> My thesis however contends that it is Attali's model of "composition" that provides the most fitting example to describe how music practices responded to mass culture.

I would like to argue that the "indie" music practices of the 1990s in Melbourne, through their use of DIY media, foreshadowed the coming of an emphasis on what cultural studies scholar Angela McRobbie terms "passionate work" in the creative industries. In McRobbie's analysis, made in the 2000s in the UK, passionate work can be understood as labour that is creatively and emotionally rewarding, or not thought of as labour in the traditional sense. This is an emphasis on labour not necessarily for economic gain, but rather for the value of community belonging as well as a creatively rewarding sense of self-expression. As McRobbie notes: "To some extent middle-class status nowadays rests upon the idea that work is something to which one has a passionate attachment."<sup>341</sup>

There is a clear relation between "passionate work" and the notion of "authenticity" as it pertains to indie music cultures. Fonarow likens the ritualistic tendencies of indie

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<sup>337</sup> Ibid., 38-39. Attali, *Noise*, 19.

<sup>338</sup> Adorno, 47.

<sup>339</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>340</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>341</sup> Angela McRobbie, *Be Creative: Making a Living in the New Culture Industries* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016), eBook collection (ProQuest Ebook Central), 36.

music performances to religious ideology, centred on its particular notion of authenticity. In Fonarow's sociological analysis, she observes the performed participation of indie music patrons at gigs. Likewise she analyses the economy of indie music centred on independent record labels, musicians and gig patrons. She discusses the crucial nature of a value system for indie music that is not based around economic value, but rather a "metaphysical" notion of indie "authenticity." Fonarow states that

we see in indie the articulation of a participatory spectatorship that is inscribed with religious ideology. [...] In this economic and institutional sector [of indie music] that is considered to be wholly secular, one finds a community shaped by metaphysical concerns regarding authority, exploitation, and the nature of "authentic" experience.<sup>342</sup>

Fonarow's discussion focuses on the performance aspect of indie music culture. Observing indie musicians' spectatorship practices, Fonarow considers these to be ritualistic in character. This notion of authenticity likewise reflects the Romantic tendency of authenticity to be considered in terms of its traceability to its point of origin. An "authentic" experience is had in attending a performance of the sincere artist, performing *in person*. Such authentic performances hold a ritual character in Benjamin's sense of the term in the fact that they imbue a sense of aura. Benjamin theorised that an artwork's "authenticity," in so much as the "authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning,"<sup>343</sup> is challenged with the reproduction of images by way of photography and printing. Benjamin suggests that what is subsequently lost from an original artwork is the artwork's "aura," something that can only be experienced at a certain place and time.<sup>344</sup> This is to Benjamin not in fact negative. For Benjamin, the aura of an artwork is bound to its historical function

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<sup>342</sup> Fonarow, *Empire of Dirt*, 22.

<sup>343</sup> Benjamin, 734.

<sup>344</sup> Ibid.

in religious ritual, a relationship that Benjamin describes as “parasitical.”<sup>345</sup>

Paradoxically, I am concerned with the ritual character inherent in the recorded music and media of DIY practitioners, rather than in their performance practices.

Nonetheless, an important relation between recorded music and performance exists with indie music practitioners through the “lo-fi” aesthetic. The “lo-fi” aesthetic is concerned with capturing a “live” sound in recordings and values the imperfections that occur through the recording process. On the one hand, a lo-fi cassette recording functions to foreground the aura of the live performance. At the same time, a lo-fi cassette tape itself can have its own aura due to its aesthetic appearance of uniqueness through its imperfections. The goal for lo-fi musicians in producing a DIY cassette release is not to make a mass-produced object, of which each cassette is perfectly identical, but a unique ritual object with its own aura. Imperfections in the recording or album art photocopying and screen-printing process can add a positive sense of individuality to these objects.

The valuing of “authentic” experience over exchange-value is also evident in McRobbie’s concept of “passionate work.” In opposition to the menial labour of standardised industrial work discussed in previous chapters, as well as for women seeking agency from traditional working class values, passionate post-industrial work emerges. McRobbie discusses such work as both a solution and yet a means of control. As McRobbie puts it,

although it has a long legacy in the history of feminine popular culture, [passionate work] comes now to stand as the female version of the more macho Steve Jobs (of Apple) ethos of ‘love your work’, which in turn reduces the potential for new forms of labour organization and even justifies wage stagnation and regression.<sup>346</sup>

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<sup>345</sup> Ibid., 736.

<sup>346</sup> McRobbie, *Be Creative*, 79.

McRobbie has noted the pertinence in this “passionate work” of Maurizio Lazzarato’s concept of “immaterial labor.” In his 1997 essay of the same name, Lazzarato outlines his concept as on one hand relating to an increase in skilled labour in the digital age and information economy, but also relating to labour involving cultural activities

that are not normally recognized as “work” — in other words, the kinds of activities involved in defining and fixing cultural and artistic standards, fashions, tastes, consumer norms, and, more strategically, public opinion.<sup>347</sup>

For the fashion and creative industry subjects of McRobbie’s case studies, such immaterial labour might be unpaid or low wage, but individuals are all too happy to engage with such activities for the reward of creative expression. In a post-industrial environment, such self-expression is ideologically encouraged or even expected. Self-expression in the neoliberal present has for Lazzarato, paradoxically, become “a discourse that is authoritarian,” in that “one *has to* express oneself, one *has to* speak.”<sup>348</sup>

With “passionate work,” McRobbie highlights a neoliberal ideology in which the reward is meaningful or fulfilling labour for the individual rather than financial gain. I would add further that an interest in authenticity and the authentic “self” separated from commercial interest becomes central. It is no wonder then that subcultural cool has been foregrounded in business literature and advertising in recent decades. For instance, in his critical 1997 book *The Conquest of Cool*, journalist Thomas Frank traced 1990s advertising’s anti-conformist rhetoric to the 1960s counterculture. Frank observed the way in which advertising had by the 1990s increasingly incorporated countercultural rhetoric of self-expression, anti-conformism and paradoxically, anti-consumerist sentiments.<sup>349</sup> DIY indie and experimental music’s value systems provide

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<sup>347</sup> Maurizio Lazzarato, “Immaterial Labor,” in *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, eds. Michael Hardt and Paolo Virno (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 133.

<sup>348</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>349</sup> Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997).

an insight into the crucial role of the “authentic” in creative industries in the present day, as well as its status over exchange-value.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have discussed the motivations and aesthetic concerns of Melbourne’s “indie” and DIY music scenes in the 1990s, focusing in particular on the Chapter Music and Spill record labels. In doing so, this chapter has argued that the notion of indie “authenticity” represents a foregrounding of music’s ritual characteristic, operating under a separate value system to typical market exchange. In indie and DIY music cultures, music’s value is reoriented to foreground the aura of the performance or the perceived authenticity of a piece of recorded music. The particular use of media by DIY musicians discussed in this chapter in order to foreground a “lo-fi” aesthetic is imperative in this value system. Indie music’s value is in its genuineness and closeness to a sincere author, rather than exchange-value. This value system functions around a “metaphysical” notion of “authentic experience” that Fonarow likens to a secular religiousness of sorts.

In Melbourne, the “indie” music culture of the 1990s developed in many senses as a further growth and extension of the independent music practices associated with the punk and post-punk movements. This period saw a continuing affinity between Australian music scenes and those in the UK, but also a growing connection with US music scenes and culture. As Wadley has commented, there were generational differences between the post-punks of the 1980s and aspects of the 1990s indie generation. Notably, this included a nostalgic return in some senses to 1960s countercultural ideals. A significant complication to the ideological underpinnings of independent music culture came in the 1990s with the mainstream success of grunge music, to which DIY scenes such as “lo-fi” and “indie pop” offered an underground counterpoint.

The adoption of “lo-fi” as a preferred aesthetic is a significant development for 1990s indie culture. The aesthetic denoted an “authentic” style and imbued recordings with a degree of subcultural capital. The “lo-fi” aesthetic offers an insight into the way in which DIY uses of media have informed the sonic qualities of the examples in this chapter. The concept of indie “authenticity” has become at once an impetus as well as an ideological underpinning for many DIY indie practices. It is my argument that this desire for “authentic” experience adds further insight into the growing ideology of “passionate work” in McRobbie’s terminology. As “both a line of flight and a site of tension and ‘capture’, ”<sup>350</sup> passionate work acts as a double-edged sword in particular for cultural workers. Passionate work speaks to creative workers’ desires for authentic self-expression, but at the same time can be exploited to justify low wages and precarious labour.<sup>351</sup> This is a phenomenon that I discuss in the final two chapters of this thesis as I turn to analyse the role of the Internet on DIY music networks and digital consumption more broadly.

By the end of the 1990s indie music culture began to adopt the growing network potential of the Internet. For instance, Guy Blackman has noted that once he gained access to the Internet in 1997, email-based mail orders and indie music Internet chat groups, such as one titled *Twee Kittens*, helped to grow the scale of the community, and build upon international networks.<sup>352</sup> In the following chapter I move forward into the late 2000s. This was a period in which the Internet was firmly established as a tool for DIY practice and networking after social media Internet platform Myspace. In the chapter I analyse the DIY initiative as a means to provide publishing, distribution and presentation opportunities to groups underrepresented in mainstream media distribution or from marginalised social backgrounds.

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<sup>350</sup> McRobbie, *Be Creative*, 52-53.

<sup>351</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>352</sup> Blackman and O’Connor.

## Chapter Five

### Gooley On The Inside: DIY Practice for Underrepresented Communities and the New Online ‘Bedroom Artists’

i fkn hate guitar music, but even more i hate boring ass dudes up on stage whinging with guitars. fuck. theres enough. doesnt anyone wanna listen to something wierd [*sic*] or different??

—Gooley On The Inside blog, September 10, 2008<sup>353</sup>

During an evening in 2008, the inner city Melbourne nightclub Roxanne Parlour is decorated with neon lights, balloons and glow sticks. Considering the way in which the club has been fitted out, tonight’s event seems a distinct nod to the electronic dance music raves that were taking place in Melbourne over a decade earlier. Among the bright colours and neon lights though, there is something of the energy of a punk show in the room. Headliners, a duo named Toxic Lipstick, take to the stage—or the floor at times—with an energetic set of songs yelled over electronic backing tracks. Dressed in colourful outfits, the duo’s synth-punk sound and brash attitude has the sound of teenage pop fans trying their hand at making hyperactive songs of their own, with skewed and twisted results. Completely absent from this event is the well-worn formula of guitar rock bands with largely male members that mostly populated Melbourne live music in the 2000s.

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<sup>353</sup> stickers [pseud.], “male dominated festivals are boring!!!!” GOOEY ON THE INSIDE, entry posted September 10, 2008, accessed December 21, 2017, <http://goeeyontheinside.blogspot.com.au/2008/09/male-dominated-festivals-are-boring.html>.



Figure 12. Toxic Lipstick perform at Gooley On The Inside's *Infinity Party*, August 8, 2008, Roxanne Parlour, Melbourne. Photo credit: Gooley On The Inside.

In this chapter I analyse the Gooley On The Inside initiative that ran in Melbourne between 2007 and 2010. In doing so I consider how they adopted DIY practices in order to provide performance opportunities for those marginalised from existing DIY music communities due to gender, sexuality, race or disability. The scope of this chapter examines more specifically the feminist and queer politics associated with Gooley. In particular, in this chapter I focus on Gooley's use of Internet media and the then recently launched social media platform Myspace (founded 2003) as well as Blogspot (launched in 1999). Furthermore, I assess the significance of the notion of the bedroom artist to their practices as well as to feminist and queer music practices more generally. In previous chapters, the sense of identity felt among participants has been centred on participating in subcultures outside of the musical mainstream. It has been noted however that a large number of participants, specifically in the post-punk and Clifton Hill Community Music Centre scenes, were overwhelmingly male. In this chapter, I would like to examine how Gooley's uptake of Web 2.0 extends upon prior



bedroom artist practices in feminist subcultural practices. I consider the feminist emphasis on private spaces of cultural production rather than public. At the same time, I discuss how the arrival of social media platforms relates to a new foregrounding of private space that has been growing since the early emergence of neoliberalism.<sup>354</sup> This is a development that I examine in relation to my underlying investigation of DIY musicians' prophetic use of media. I consider the implications for subcultural practice on this development, including the feminist and queer activist practices of Gooley, in so far as these changes signal a new tension between the private and public, the individual and community.

### **The history of Gooley On The Inside**

Gooley On The Inside was a Melbourne-based initiative that produced physical events, exhibitions and parties. Run by Holly Childs and Kati Cubby, Gooley held over 40 music and art events between 2007 and 2010. In their programming they had a noted focus “on young people who identified as women, trans, queer, and people of colour, [Gooley On The Inside] strived to create space, agency, audience, support and a thriving, dynamic environment and build a community for [their] artists.”<sup>355</sup> Gooley On The Inside provided an outlet, in Childs' words, for “performers, or people that do not have a place.”<sup>356</sup> Specifically, the initiative sought to develop a platform as a counterpoint to the male dominance of DIY music communities in Melbourne at the time. In this chapter I seek to position Gooley particularly within the lineage of feminist DIY music practices. Childs has recently reflected that while being unable to recall precisely the origins of the name “Gooley On The Inside,” its choice was one of picking a name that evoked a sense of emotion, “sensitivity and play.” The playful name is further reflected in a term Gooley used to describe the types of artists that they

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<sup>354</sup> Recall on this point my discussion in Chapter Three of the Sony Walkman.

<sup>355</sup> Cubby and Childs.

<sup>356</sup> Holly Childs, interview by Jared Davis, Melbourne, July 4, 2016, audio recording.

supported, “nu-egg talent.” This term evokes a sense of nurturing and sensitivity, as well as punning on the fact that the egg is a “real-world gooey on the inside object.”<sup>357</sup>



Figure 13. Gooley On The Inside’s *Infinity Party*, August 8, 2008, Roxanne Parlour, Melbourne. Photo credit: Gooley On The Inside.

Childs notes that a formative inspiration for the foundation of Gooley On The Inside by her and Kati Cubby was an exposure to the DIY music and art space 610 Studios in Fortitude Valley, Brisbane. 610 Studios, according to Childs, featured more diverse programming both stylistically as well as with stronger female representation than the Melbourne independent music communities she had encountered at the time. Gooley On The Inside was subsequently formed in “finding a need to respond to [Melbourne music’s] male-dominated culture.”<sup>358</sup> Gooley maintained a connection to punk subcultures through their DIY sensibility. However they eschewed the muted visual aesthetic and dress, as well as the hyper-masculine performance of Melbourne’s guitar-oriented punk community. The persistent dominance of and bias towards male musicians in Australian independent music is evident to this day. A 2017 study by *Hack*, a radio program on Australia’s national youth broadcaster Triple J, has demonstrated that male musicians remain more strongly represented in almost all areas

<sup>357</sup> Holly Childs, email message to Jared Davis, November 6, 2017.

<sup>358</sup> Childs, interview by Davis.

of the independent and major music industries. This includes radio play, awards received as well as live bookings at music festivals. This is despite a near-even gender spread of students studying music in high schools and university.<sup>359</sup> Triple J takes an annual poll of its listeners' favourite 100 releases, named the *Hottest 100*. By 2013 after 20 years of the poll, just eight female musicians or female-fronted acts had charted, with only one female artist making the top 30 tracks.<sup>360</sup>

Reading through the literature of the Melbourne DIY punk and independent music community of the mid-2000s, a growing awareness of this male dominance becomes apparent. For instance, a letter to the editor of the Melbourne punk magazine *What We Do Is Secret* by writer Halley Brain-Child reflected on the content of the magazine's first issue (September 2005) as follows:

Issue One of What We Do Is Secret [*sic*] sure caused quite a stir in the DIY punk community. For a couple of days, it seemed to be all that anyone was talking about. According to the natter, WWDIS was boring; half filler, reviews of blokey shows, homophobic, priggish. You featured pictures of men; men with their shirts open, sweaty men, men smoking guitars and playing big cigarettes and to a lesser extent you featured pictures of women; women out of focus, women with their shirts off, one woman in an advert, oh, and finally almost at the very back of the mag you featured Kiosk (and we know how Kiosk feel about WWDIS now).<sup>361</sup>

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<sup>359</sup> Ange McCormack, "By the Numbers: The Gender Gap in the Australian Music Industry," Hack, *triple j*, March 7, 2017, accessed December 21, 2017, <http://www.abc.net.au/triplej/programs/hack/by-the-numbers-the-gender-gap-in-the-australian-music-industry/8328952>.

<sup>360</sup> Sarah Bella, "9 Things to Take Away from Triple J's Hottest 100 of the Past 20 Years," *Music Feeds*, 10 June 2013, accessed 21 December 2017, <http://musicfeeds.com.au/features/9-things-to-take-away-from-triple-js-hottest-100-of-the-past-20-years/>.

<sup>361</sup> Halley Brain-Child, "What We Do Is In Motion," *What We Do Is Secret* 1, no. 4 (December 2005): 5.

Kiosk was a punk band that included queer and female members and had been interviewed for an article “at the very back of” that first issue. In the interview the band expressed opinions on the male-dominated nature of local punk music scenes. For instance, the group noted that they had been motivated to form a band after taking inspiration from US feminist punk groups Bikini Kill and Huggy Bear. They expressed “a desire to make music for people like ourselves and people who aren’t being represented locally especially within a punk context. By that I mean like, women and queer kids, etc.”<sup>362</sup> After the release of the issue however, Kiosk distanced themselves from the magazine, contributing a letter to the editor stating:

Kiosk do not in any way support or endorse this magazine. We do not agree with a lot of what has been printed within these pages. If we had known what it would be like, we would not have contributed in the ways that we did. We apologise if anyone got the wrong impression and to those who felt as alienated and upset as we did.<sup>363</sup>

The growing concern here for feminism and queer activism in Melbourne’s young musical underground can be read against the political backdrop of a prior decade of social conservatism in Australia. In 1996, the Labor Government under Prime Minister Paul Keating was defeated in a Federal election by the centre-right coalition of the Liberal Party and National Party, after which the Liberal Party’s John Howard became Prime Minister for the next eleven years. What followed was the Howard Government’s acceleration of a neoliberal agenda that included reducing social security, encouraging private healthcare, funding cuts to universities and industrial relations reform that sought to weaken unions.<sup>364</sup> Increasing social conservatism also marked the Howard years, with Howard’s conservatism defining policy regarding

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<sup>362</sup> Kiosk, “Do It Yourself,” *What We Do Is Secret* 1, no. 1 (September 2005): 36.

<sup>363</sup> Kiosk, “What We Do Is Alienate,” *What We Do Is Secret* 1, no. 2 (October 2005): 3.

<sup>364</sup> Gwynneth Singleton, *The Howard Government*, (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2000), 4-5.

issues such as euthanasia, sexuality and indigenous affairs.<sup>365</sup> By 2007, after eleven years under the Howard Federal Government, a Labor Government under the leadership of Kevin Rudd was elected in a landslide vote. Analysis has shown that rising support for the Labor Party at this time among young people, who were at odds with Howard's conservatism, was a crucial factor in the 2007 election.<sup>366</sup> Gooley was founded during this political and cultural landscape.

More recent comments made by Childs echo such observations as those made by Kiosk in reflecting on mid-2000s Melbourne's overtly masculine music culture and underrepresentation of female and queer performers. Childs notes that she and her peers would wonder about the masculine aesthetic of live music shows: "Why is it always dark, smoky rooms with men onstage playing guitars?"<sup>367</sup> Gooley thus became a platform for stylistically diverse performances. The initiative hosted DIY electronic music, hip-hop, bedroom pop music and utilised a bright and colourful visual aesthetic.

### **Gooley On The Inside's events and their aesthetic precedents: reviving rave aesthetics**

In the following section, I discuss the aesthetic concerns of artists affiliated with Gooley, and analyse the implications of these aesthetics in relation to their uses of media. Furthermore, I discuss precedents in Melbourne and internationally for their practices. In particular, I would like to argue that the aesthetics of Gooley can be situated between the seemingly disparate ongoing influences of the rave culture of electronic dance music and the feminist punk riot grrrl movement.

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<sup>365</sup> Robyn Hollander, "Economic Liberalism, Social Conservatism and Australian Federalism," *Australian Journal of Politics & History* 54, no. 1 (March 2008): 98-100.

<sup>366</sup> Dylan Kissane, "Kevin07, Web 2.0 and Young Voters at the 2007 Australian Federal Election," *CEU Political Science Journal* 4, no. 2 (2009): 162-163.

<sup>367</sup> Childs, interview by Davis.

Events presented by Gooley included *Infinity Party* (2008), an evening at the Roxanne Parlour nightclub in the Melbourne city centre. The event's lineup included among others Toxic Lipstick, a laser show by sound and audio-visual artist Robin Fox, as well as rappers Ultra Violet MC and B12 Shot. Also performing was electronic musician Xian (real name Christian Bishop), who produced "breakcore" music, fusing dance music styles such as "breakbeat" and "gabber" into noisier and more experimental territory.<sup>368</sup> Photo documentation of the event demonstrates the use of aesthetics that borrow from 1990s rave culture such as the use of glow sticks, bright dayglo outfits, neon lighting and audio-visual aspects such as Fox's laser show.

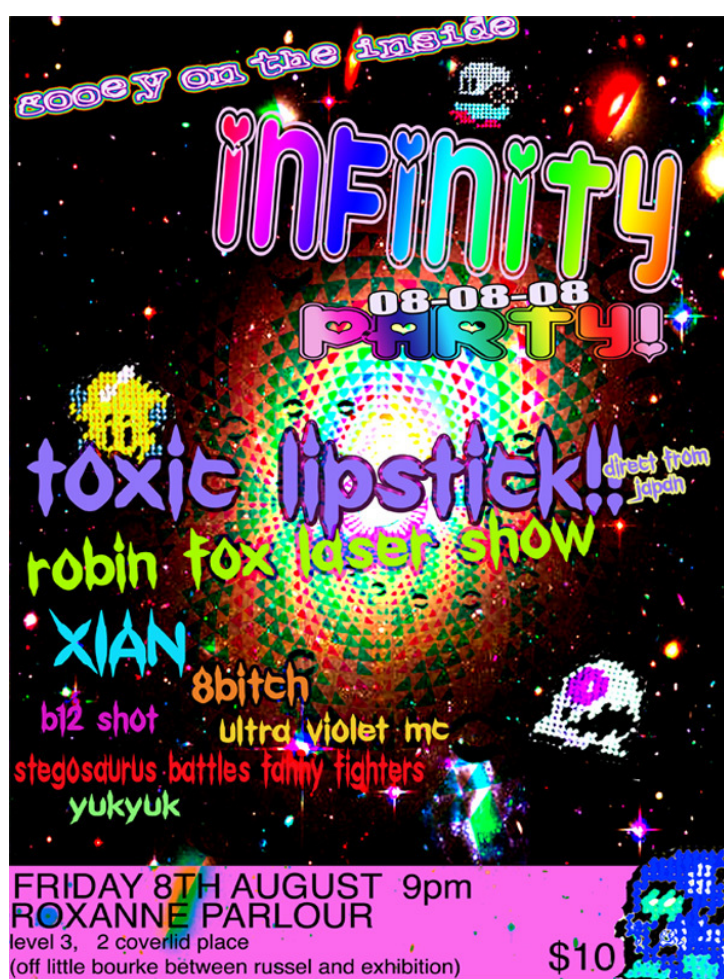


Figure 14. Gooley On The Inside *Infinity Party* flyer, 2008.

<sup>368</sup> Christian Bishop (Xian), "xian | Free Listening on SoundCloud," SoundCloud, accessed December 21, 2017, <https://soundcloud.com/xian>.

Rave culture refers to a scene that emerged first within the UK of all-night electronic dance music parties. The phenomenon began first noticeably in London, when DJs such as Paul Oakenfold were inspired on returning from Ibiza's club music scene. The Ibizan scene's eclectic DJs, whose style was named "Balearic" after the island's location, were known to mix music across genres. This mix of genres included house music, an influential style of electronic music emerging from Chicago's black gay club scene. House is characterised by its kick drum beat on all four beats of a musical bar, or "four-to-the-floor." Disco and mainstream Euro-pop music were included, as was techno, a heavily synthesized style of electronic club music emerging first from Detroit in the early-to-mid 1980s. These musical influences, coupled with the arrival of the party drug ecstasy (MDMA), saw the birth of all-night rave dance parties in London during the late 1980s. Due to strict licensing laws, these parties often took place either illegally after hours in venues, or in illegally used warehouse spaces.<sup>369</sup>

The influence of the UK rave scene had a prominent presence in both Melbourne and Sydney in the 1990s.<sup>370</sup> Key to the birth of rave in Melbourne was a record store named Central Station in the city centre, stocking underground house music records from abroad during the 1980s. Davide Carbone, a DJ and member of techno group Future Sound of Melbourne (FSOM) has reflected on the rave scene's first emergence in Melbourne at the end of the 1980s. Carbone discusses how DJs slowly brought overseas influences into Melbourne's established inner city nightclubs:

The '88, '89 period was really [centred around the nightclubs] Inflation, Chevron, the Commerce Club, Industry, a nightclub called Zuzu's. I'd managed to blag my way into playing at Industry by amassing a fairly average record collection – and this was extremely early days where Melbourne was dominated

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<sup>369</sup> Simon Reynolds, *Energy Flash: A Journey through Rave Music and Dance Culture*, 3rd ed. (London: Picador, 2013), 16-19, 43-51.

<sup>370</sup> Jim Poe, "An Oral History of the Sydney Rave Scene, 1989-1994," *Red Bull*, July 27, 2016, accessed December 21, 2017, <https://www.redbull.com/au-en/oral-history-of-the-sydney-rave-scene-1989-1994>.

Jim Poe, "An Oral History of Melbourne's Rave Scene, '88-'97," *Red Bull*, July 25, 2017, accessed December 21, 2017, <https://www.redbull.com/au-en/melbourne-rave-scene-oral-history-1988-1997>.



either by disco or alternative, or maybe even Balearic style at this stage. And so there was no way you were able to play anything underground-house related. But a few artists paved the way for us to start playing some stuff that was a bit more acceptable [to our tastes].<sup>371</sup>

Rave culture grew in Melbourne with community radio shows on 3RRR *Rhythmic*, hosted by Carbone, and *Beat On The Street*, hosted by DJ Kate Bathgate. Gradually, larger audiences in Melbourne's clubs began to dress in the bright, street-wear oriented fashion of rave culture. Likewise clubbers came to embrace and expect music such as acid house, a subgenre of house music closely affiliated with rave culture, built around a prominent use of the Roland TB-303 Bass Line synthesizer.<sup>372</sup> The culture developed not only in Melbourne's established inner city nightclubs, but also within warehouse spaces with varying degrees of legality.

The availability in Melbourne of vacant spaces in which to hold raves was due in part to a financial crash and subsequent recession that hit Australia from 1987. This recession caused the eventual collapse in 1990 of a large building society based in Victoria, Pyramid, at the expense of AUD 900 million to the state of Victoria. Housing interest rates also rose steeply to 17.5% by 1990.<sup>373</sup> Richard John, a British expat and rave party organiser who had experienced rave's first wave in London over 1988-1989, commented on the availability of space for raves:

At the time, same as in Sydney, everything was for sale in Melbourne. In the early '90s, interest rates skyrocketed, everything was for lease, and you could go in – same as Sydney, you could go in, and to the real estate agent, "Say, look

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<sup>371</sup> Poe, "An Oral History of Melbourne's Rave Scene."

<sup>372</sup> Ibid.

Reynolds, 30-31.

<sup>373</sup> David Ross, "What Happened to Australians the Last Time House Prices Fell," Money, *The New Daily*, Thursday March 3, 2017, accessed January 9, 2018, <https://thenewdaily.com.au/money/property/2017/03/03/last-housing-crash/>.



mate, here's a grand," so it was easy to get venues.<sup>374</sup>

This comment by John reflects a growing difficulty in Melbourne for musicians, artists and party organisers to find affordable physical spaces, with a real estate market that has consistently been booming since the late 1990s. As John notes, "from getting a venue for a \$1000 in 1990, to paying \$10,000 in 1999, it was harder and harder."<sup>375</sup> John and his partner Hydi John would go on to establish Global Village in the mid-1990s, a giant licensed club in a former warehouse space. Known to host over 3000 punters, Global Village was the largest dancefloor in the Southern Hemisphere. Such was the exponential growth in popularity of rave culture in Melbourne during the 1990s.<sup>376</sup> As with its emergence in the UK, there was a strong presence of party drugs including ecstasy in the Melbourne rave community.<sup>377</sup>

Gooley On The Inside's events were not necessarily dance parties in the strict tradition of the rave scene. Rather, Gooley's use of the aesthetics of rave could be examined as a quotation of these aesthetics, or appropriation, for live music gigs and events intersecting with art installations. Gooley's events took place in nightclubs and live music venues, such as Roxanne Parlour and Pony in the Melbourne city centre, DIY artist-run spaces, such as Forepaw, an artist-run space that was located on High Street in Northcote. Events were also held at warehouse art spaces, including Irene's, an artist-run warehouse and cooperative located in the inner northern, formerly industrial Melbourne suburb of East Brunswick.<sup>378</sup> Where DIY independent and punk music of the time in Melbourne featured a heavy focus on electric guitars and dark clothing, the scene associated with Gooley found a point of aesthetic differentiation in their revival of rave aesthetics. Gooley's use of rave as a stylistic quotation mixed with more

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<sup>374</sup> Poe, "An Oral History of Melbourne's Rave Scene."

<sup>375</sup> Ibid.

<sup>376</sup> Ibid.

<sup>377</sup> Chris Zwar, "In Search of a Subculture" (online video), published September 16, 2015, accessed December 21, 2017, <https://vimeo.com/139537124>.

<sup>378</sup> Gooley On The Inside, "flyerz | Flickr," Flickr, accessed December 21, 2017, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/gooleyonthinside/albums/72157606701889151/page1>.

contemporary media—specifically Internet media—to my analysis is not representative of nostalgia for a prior genre, but rather a continuation of that genre’s utopian futurism. The futurism of rave was fitting for Gooley’s aims regarding female and queer inclusion, considering rave was also known for its inclusive rhetoric among participants of the subculture.<sup>379</sup>

A revival of rave aesthetics had other global counterparts during the 2000s, as well as among other independent electronic musicians voicing feminist concerns through their practices. This included the genre “electroclash,” often associated with the performer Peaches, an artist strongly regarded for her positive representations of female sexuality.<sup>380</sup> Electroclash drew from the futurism of electro, synth-pop and rave cultural aesthetics, as well as the visual aesthetic of the 1982 science fiction film *Liquid Sky*.<sup>381</sup> Also associated in their music with the genre of electroclash—although their output is diverse—is the interdisciplinary art and music collective Chicks On Speed, started in Munich by international art students in 1997. Founding member of the group Alex Murray-Leslie is an Australian, originally from Melbourne, and the group has developed projects in and toured to Melbourne on a number of occasions. Chicks On Speed maintained a strong following in the city during the mid-2000s.<sup>382</sup> In one Gooley event held at the Northcote art space and restaurant Disco Beans, a band was listed on the flyer using the moniker “Chicks On Weed,” a playful allusion to the aforementioned group.<sup>383</sup>

Gooley’s use of rave aesthetics is a prominent feature of the flyers designed for their parties. Bright colours, pop culture references and a strong emphasis on futuristic

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<sup>379</sup> Thornton, 91.

<sup>380</sup> Kitty Empire, “Ripe for Stardom,” Culture, *The Observer*, Sunday August 17, 2003, accessed January 5, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/theobserver/2003/aug/17/features.review17>.

<sup>381</sup> Daniel Genis, “Punks, UFOs, and Heroin: How ‘Liquid Sky’ Became a Cult Movie,” *The Daily Beast*, Monday June 2, 2014, accessed January 5, 2018, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/punks-ufos-and-heroin-how-liquid-sky-became-a-cult-movie>.

<sup>382</sup> Louise Gray, “Chicks on Speed,” In Writing, Interviews, *The Wire*, August, 2010, accessed December 21, 2017, <https://www.thewire.co.uk/in-writing/interviews/chicks-on-speed.2>.

<sup>383</sup> Gooley On The Inside, “flyerz | Flickr.”

typography feature in Gooley's posters, design aspects that are analogous to rave posters produced in the 1990s. Some posters and events allude to rave culture directly, such as the *RAVENATION* event, presented by Gooley as part of the *Electrofringe* program at Newcastle's *This Is Not Art Festival* in 2008.<sup>384</sup> The *RAVENATION* event flyer features the iconic yellow smiley face, a symbol of the rave movement.<sup>385</sup> Reviewing the event for Australian media arts magazine *RealTime*, writer Dan Mackinlay commented that

everything from breakcore to cabaret is compressed in RAVENATION into a parodical three hour hyper-rave with smoke machine, lasers and fake MDMA included, not to mention an animatronic latex penis mask, all broadcast in animated GIF art on Myspace.<sup>386</sup>

Mackinlay's comment observes the humorous and self-conscious means in which Gooley made quotations of rave subcultural traits (MDMA, lasers and smoke machines), in the spirit of postmodern appropriation. What is most of note in this comment for this chapter however, is the way in which an online space such as Myspace (which Mackinlay notes was being posted on during the event), associated with the private sphere and domestic Internet usage, would play into the event in public space. Later in this chapter I will discuss further the implications for feminist DIY music initiatives of such a convergence of private and public space through digital media.

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<sup>384</sup> Ibid. *This Is Not Art* was founded in 1998 by media arts and activist collective Octapod. Darren Tofts, *Interzone: Media Arts in Australia* (Fishermans Bend, VIC: Craftsman House, 2005), 141.

<sup>385</sup> Reynolds, 48.

<sup>386</sup> Dan Mackinlay, "Electrofringe Will Eat Itself," *RealTime*, no. 88 (December-January 2008): 26.



Figure 15. Gooley On The Inside *Ravenation* event flyer.

There are other initiatives and artists worth mentioning regarding the stylistic interests of this scene during this period in Melbourne. These include Curse Ov Dialect, an experimental hip-hop group whose music fuses together experimental music composition, electronic music and hip hop, with a strong interest in racial politics in Australia.<sup>387</sup> MC Raceless of Curse Ov Dialect presented a DJ set at a Gooley On The Inside party in 2010.<sup>388</sup> Another key event series in Melbourne at the time was the Stutter experimental music evenings, curated by Annalee Koernig and presented at the inner city bar Horse Bazaar. The bar itself was initiated with a media arts audience in mind, featuring installed projectors and an audio-visual event programming focus.<sup>389</sup> Stutter hosted performances by members of Curse Ov Dialect as well as some of the

<sup>387</sup> Tone Deaf, "Track by Track: Curse Ov Dialect Take Us inside Their New LP 'Twisted Strangers'," *Tone Deaf*, May 13, 2016, accessed December 22, 2017, <http://tonedeaf.com.au/track-by-track-curse-ov-dialect-take-us-inside-their-new-lp-twisted-strangers>.

<sup>388</sup> stickers [pseud.], "Summa Summa party !!! #2 !!!" GOOEY ON THE INSIDE, entry posted March 15, 2010, accessed December 21, 2017, <http://gooeyontheinside.blogspot.com.au/2010/03/summa-summa-party-2.html>.

<sup>389</sup> Beat, "Horse Bazaar," Beat, accessed January 5, 2018, <http://www.beat.com.au/venue/horse-bazaar/melbourne-cbd-397-little-lonsdale-st-3000>.

aforementioned musicians who had played at Gooey events, such as Robin Fox and Xian. The RMIT Media Arts program and Sound Art stream had a notable influence on experimental music activities in Melbourne in the 2000s, with some cross involvement of students at the Media Arts department and the aforementioned events and groups.<sup>390</sup>

The previous chapter examined Melbourne indie music's use of media that could be seen as anti-technological and a favouring of the "lo-fi" aesthetic as a sign of authenticity. In this chapter however, I am analysing a Melbourne DIY community that ascribes a positive potential to technology. This is evident in Gooey's continuation of rave aesthetics—a genre that was fundamentally technological and aesthetically futuristic—along with their use of electronic and specifically Internet media.

### **Gooey's feminist practices and their Australian and international precedents: riot grrrl and Rock 'n' Roll High School**

One example of the bands affiliated with Gooey On The Inside was Toxic Lipstick. Originally from Brisbane, Toxic Lipstick was a duo that performed in character as obnoxious and brash teenage schoolgirls. The duo made use of a bright visual aesthetic that appears to have been drawn from the aesthetics of 1990s British bugglegum pop groups such as Shampoo and the girl-pop band Spice Girls. The influence of Japanese Harajuku fashion is also evident in Toxic Lipstick's aesthetic.<sup>391</sup> Their music can be likened to a mix of playful amateur pop songs made by teenage friends, combined with the loud brashness of synth-punk and riot grrrl.

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<sup>390</sup> Experimental Melbourne, "Experimental Melbourne," accessed December 21, 2017, <http://exp-melb.blogspot.com.au/search?q=rmit>.

<sup>391</sup> Harajuku fashion is a street style subculture emerging from the Tokyo district of Harajuku. The subculture's teenager participants dress in elaborate and colourful outfits, drawing from an array of pop and subcultural influences, and present their outfits publicly by gathering in the Harajuku area. Toxic Lipstick discuss Harajuku fashion (as well as US pop singer Gwen Stefani's appropriation of the phenomenon) in an interview for the fourth issue of *What We Do Is Secret*. Halley Brain-Child, "Gwen Sux, Toxic Lipstick Rulez," *What We Do Is Secret* 1, no. 4 (December 2005): 16-17.

Riot grrrl was a globally influential feminist punk movement that emerged during the early 1990s in Olympia, Washington in the US. The movement sought to counter the gender hierarchy of the Washington punk scene and develop third wave feminist activism through meetings, gigs and fanzines.<sup>392</sup> Childs has commented more recently that riot grrrl provided a direct influence to her activities.<sup>393</sup> The multifaceted nature of riot grrrl has seen cultural studies scholar Marion Leonard note that the movement differs from what might conventionally be called a subculture. Leonard states:

The term sub-culture tends to suggest a group displaying integrated behaviour, beliefs and attitudes. [I intend] to avoid this notion of unity by conceptualising riot grrrl as a ‘network’. This is a term used by riot grrrls to describe the informal ways in which they make contacts through letters, friendship books and zines.<sup>394</sup>

Conceiving of riot grrrl as a “network,” one might observe that in their use of printed media riot grrrl developed global networks that were preemptive of the coming digital age. This is a useful observation in considering my underlying argument in this thesis regarding the prophetic use of media by DIY music cultures. Kathleen Hanna and Tobi Vail of the influential band Bikini Kill are credited with the first use of the term “Riot Grrrl” as the title of a fanzine they produced in 1991.<sup>395</sup> At a renowned Bikini Kill concert, Hanna famously called out for “all girls to the front” of the stage, and “all boys be cool, for once in your lives. Go back.” This was an active reversal of the typically more passive listening role that women had been subjected to at punk gigs at that time, likewise calling on men to no longer dominate venue spaces as attendees as much as performers.<sup>396</sup> A fanzine produced by Bikini Kill also coined the term “girl power,” with its implications of reclaiming a new empowered feminised aesthetics.

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<sup>392</sup> Marcus, 52-59

<sup>393</sup> Childs, interview by Davis.

<sup>394</sup> Leonard, 102.

<sup>395</sup> Vail had earlier developed the spelling “grrrl” for a previous fanzine, as a playful variation on feminist practices of changing the spelling of “women,” for instance to “womyn.” Marcus, 80-81.

<sup>396</sup> *The Punk Singer*, directed by Sini Anderson (Opening Band Films, 2014), iTunes.

The British pop band Spice Girls later appropriated this term in the mid-1990s. This cooptation by the mainstream popular music industry was not well received by initial riot grrrl zine makers, who had opted to retreat from mainstream press coverage of their movement.<sup>397</sup>

In the early 1990s, contemporaneous to the emergence of riot grrrl, Melbourne had its own unique initiative for the inclusion of young women in male-dominated indie rock and punk scenes. Rock 'n' Roll High School was a music school predominantly for girls and all female bands. The school was formally established in 1990 initially in East Melbourne before soon relocating to 186 Easey Street in Collingwood.<sup>398</sup> Rock 'n' Roll High School continued until 2002, after which the building stayed in use as a rehearsal space.<sup>399</sup> Collingwood, a formerly working class suburb in Melbourne's inner north, alongside its neighbouring Fitzroy, were host to much of Melbourne's live music scene for indie rock and punk. During the 1990s these suburbs were home to venues such as The Punters Club, The Evelyn (both on Brunswick Street, Fitzroy), The Empress (St Georges Road, North Fitzroy) and the Tote (Johnston Street, Collingwood). Stephanie Bourke, a musician and drummer for the Melbourne indie rock band Hecate (known as Litany in the US), ran Rock 'n' Roll High School.<sup>400</sup> As an editorial comment (presumably written by Bourke) in the Winter 1993 edition of the school's newsletter reflects:

The school began in 1989 as a 2 week program with just 20 young girls. From these humble beginnings, Rock 'n' Roll High School has come a long way.

With minimal advertising, and lots of word of mouth, the school now has a

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<sup>397</sup> Anita Harris, "Revisiting Bedroom Culture: New Spaces for Young Women's Politics," *Hecate* 27, no. 1 (2001): 134.

<sup>398</sup> Rock 'n' Roll High School, "About Rock 'n' Roll High School," *Rock 'n' Roll High School Newsletter*, no. 8, July 1995, unnumbered.

Rock 'n' Roll High School, *What Next in Music*, no. 2, October 1990, 1.

<sup>399</sup> Rachel Buchanan, "Life Rocks on Easey St," *Music, The Age*, Wednesday February 23, 2005, accessed December 21, 2017, <http://www.theage.com.au/news/Music/Life-rocks-on-Easey-St/2005/02/22/1109046915994.html>.

<sup>400</sup> Teri Vanhorn, "Rock 'n' Roll High School Not Just a Punk Song," *News, Music, MTV*, July 6, 1998, accessed December 22, 2017, <http://www.mtv.com/news/400311/rock-n-roll-high-school-not-just-a-punk-song/>.

massive enrolment of 130 girls, 10 boys and 24 bands, many of whom are writing original material that exhibits much creativity and talent.<sup>401</sup>

At various times the school received funding from the Ministry for the Arts, Rechstein Foundation, Victorian Women's Trust, The Victorian Rock Foundation as well as the Coca-Cola Bottlers Fund.<sup>402</sup> Alongside teaching music at 186 Easey Street, the school hosted gigs, both onsite as well as benefit concerts at sites such as Collingwood Hall. The school produced a staple-bound and photocopied newsletter detailing and reviewing gigs performed by its students and bands—sometimes at venues, sometimes at schools including Fitzroy Primary School, Richmond Girls and Richmond Secondary College.<sup>403</sup> This newsletter functioned as a general bulletin of achievements at the school and of its bands, noting mentions in print magazines such as *NME*, appearances on TV (national broadcasters ABC and SBS) as well as radio airplay on community radio stations 3RRR, 3CR, 3PBS and Triple J.<sup>404</sup> The school also produced compilation CDs featuring recordings of its bands, with distribution from Shock records.<sup>405</sup> Funding was received by the school to record bands for airplay on community broadcasters 3PBS, 3CR and 3RRR.<sup>406</sup>

Notable international indie rock bands visited the school while touring Australia, including Sonic Youth, Washington hardcore punk band Fugazi and riot grrrl influencers Babes In Toyland.<sup>407</sup> L7, a rock band from Los Angeles with all-female members, were an influence to the riot grrrl movement and visited Rock 'n' Roll High

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<sup>401</sup> Rock 'n' Roll High School, "Around the Bands," *Rock 'n' Roll High School Newsletter*, Winter 1993, unnumbered.

<sup>402</sup> *Rock 'n' Roll High School Newsletter*, no. 4, 1991, 1.

*Rock 'n' Roll High School Newsletter*, no. 5, Winter 1992, 1.

<sup>403</sup> Rock 'n' Roll High School, "Editor's Report," *Rock 'n' Roll High School Newsletter*, no. 6, Summer 1993, unnumbered.

<sup>404</sup> Rock 'n' Roll High School, *Rock 'n' Roll High School Newsletter*, Winter 1993, unnumbered.

<sup>405</sup> Rock 'n' Roll High School, *Rock 'n' Roll High School Newsletter*, no. 9, 1996, 10-13.

<sup>406</sup> Rock 'n' Roll High School, "News," *Rock 'n' Roll High School Newsletter*, no. 4, 1991, 2.

<sup>407</sup> Rock 'n' Roll High School, *Rock 'n' Roll High School Newsletter*, Winter 1993, unnumbered.



School in 1993. In an interview with *NME*, L7 band member Donita Sparks reflected on the visit:

When we were in Melbourne, we were invited to this incredible music school run by a woman called Stephanie. She has about 130 students aged between seven and twenty, most of them girls, and she teaches them Mudhoney, Sonic Youth, Breeders and Dinosaur Jnr songs as well as classical pieces. She's into the art of music, her goal is to motivate and give her pupils some sort of self esteem. We were treated to a drum recital by this ten-year-old girl wearing a 'Shit Happens' T-shirt. It was the coolest thing ever.<sup>408</sup>

The pre-teen drummer referred to by Sparks here was Miranda De'ath of Bratfinx and later an indie-pop band named Midget Stooges.<sup>409</sup> Sonic Youth's Kim Gordon also commented on the school in an interview with *NME*, stating with regard to the students' performances:

We just sat there and these bands just got up and played, and it was really amazing. Most of the kids are about 16, and some of them are high school drop-outs, and the whole thing's run by this one young woman who doesn't get much funding. It's really bizarre.<sup>410</sup>

A 1995 documentary film on women in independent music *Not Bad For A Girl* includes footage from L7's visit to Rock 'n' Roll High School in 1992, alongside riot grrrl, grunge and alternative bands with female members.<sup>411</sup>

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<sup>408</sup> Rock 'n' Roll High School, "So That's What They Look Like..." *Rock 'n' Roll High School Newsletter*, no. 6, Summer 1993, unnumbered.

<sup>409</sup> Ibid. Vanhorn.

<sup>410</sup> Rock 'n' Roll High School, "Print," *Rock 'n' Roll High School Newsletter*, Winter 1993, unnumbered.

<sup>411</sup> Rock 'n' Roll High School, *Rock 'n' Roll High School Newsletter*, no. 8, July 1995, unnumbered.

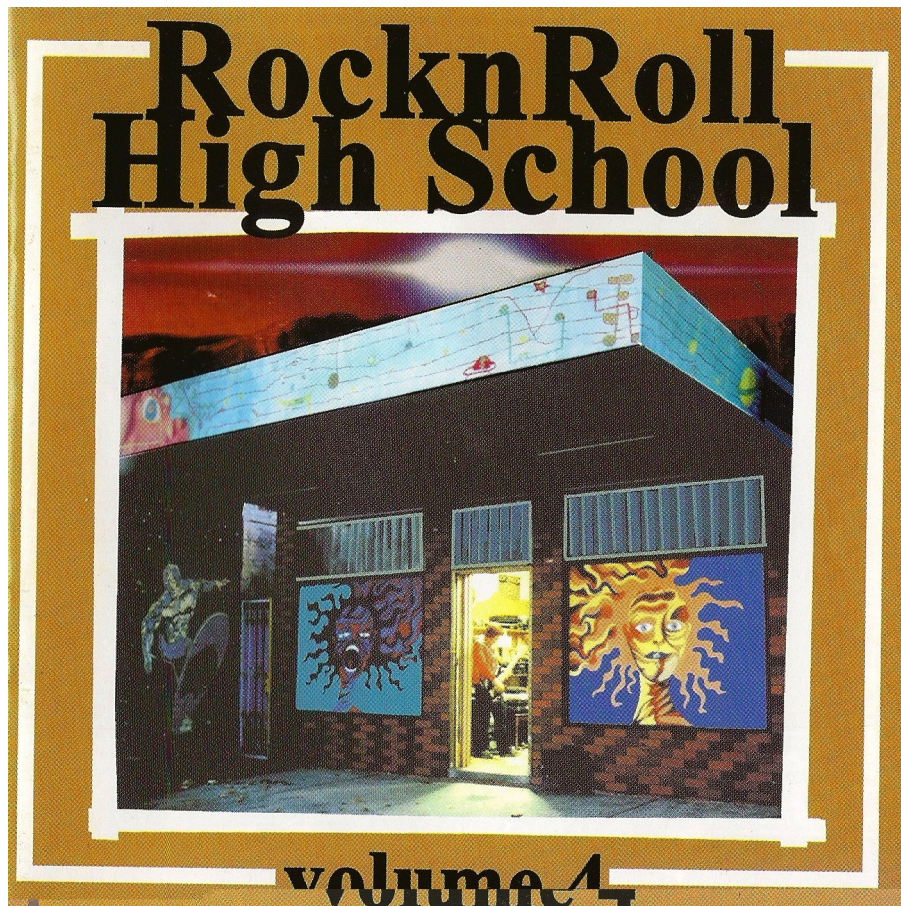


Figure 16. Rock ‘n’ Roll High School compilation, volume 4, 2001. Cover art picturing Rock ‘n’ Roll High School, Easey Street, Collingwood.

The particular feminist tactics employed by Gooley hold some kinship with the riot grrrl movement. Feminist scholar Rebecca Munford notes of central importance to the riot grrrl’s ethos was its acceptance of the plurality of experiences that make up gender identities. Riot grrrl rejected a totalising conception of “womanhood.” Munford discusses the importance of feminist philosopher Judith Butler on such thinking, and states:

Central to its [riot grrrl’s] pro-girl ethos is a reclamation of girlhood as a space from which to negotiate speaking positions for girls and young women whose experiences and desires are marginalised by the ontological and epistemological

assumptions of a feminism that speaks for them under the universalising category of ‘woman’.<sup>412</sup>

Among these expressions were the reclamation of aesthetics that Munford notes have been termed “girlie.”<sup>413</sup> The use of “girlie” aesthetics by Toxic Lipstick was an uncommon aesthetic choice in Melbourne’s statistically male-dominated independent music scene. This was a choice that challenged the assumption of the “masculine” being coded as of symbolically higher value than the (particularly young) feminine. In Toxic Lipstick a complete lineage of the aesthetic of “girl power” is apparent, from riot grrrl through to its mainstream commercial pop instances with mid-to-late 1990s girl groups. The group injected a crude sense of humour into their characters, as well as a distinctly Australian sensibility. For instance, they would notably perform a cover of the theme song for Australian teenage soap opera *Home & Away*. In a 2005 interview with online music publication *Faster Louder*, Toxic Lipstick answered questions in character, stretching the truth and steering the interview into the language of their performance personas. At one stage during the discussion, the group referred to the influence of Australian teen bubblegum pop singer Nikki Webster on their music, claiming “we have just finished our cover of [Webster’s hit] *Strawberry Kisses* and Nikki has expressed interest in remixing our track, *I Smoke My Vomit*.”<sup>414</sup> In contrast to the masculine aesthetics that were still coded as the norm for mid-2000s punk music in Melbourne, this use of adolescent or childlike femininity was consciously subversive. There is a precedent in Australia also for this strategy. Chrissy Amphlett of the 1980s rock band Divinyl’s was known for wearing school uniforms and her lyrics addressing female sexuality, in a rock music scene largely dominated by men.<sup>415</sup>

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<sup>412</sup> Rebecca Munford, “‘Wake up and Smell the Lipgloss’: Gender, Generation and the (a)Politics of Girl Power,” in *Third Wave Feminism: A Critical Exploration*, eds. Stacy Gillis, Gillian Howie, and Rebecca Munford (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 269-270.

<sup>413</sup> Ibid., 268.

<sup>414</sup> Faster Louder, “Toxic Lipstick Reveal All,” *Faster Louder*, May 9, 2015, accessed July 5, 2016, <http://fasterlouder.junkee.com/toxic-lipstick-reveal-all/773466>.

<sup>415</sup> Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, “Chrissy Amphlett’s School Uniform,” Australian Dress Register, accessed January 5, 2018, <http://www.australiandressregister.org/garment/605/>.

Kate Geck of Toxic Lipstick also performed in a duo with Melbourne artist Emily Hasslehoof named BAADDD. The group produced frenetic synth-punk, with loud drum-machine oriented backing tracks and energetic, screamed punk vocals. Like Toxic Lipstick, the duo's music was coupled with an unapologetic sense of humour that is markedly different to the seriousness and machismo of the dominant punk subculture of the day. Footage on YouTube from a 2009 BAADDD tour of the US was posted on the Gooley On The Inside blog. In the video, Geck and Hasslehoof are performing in an outdoor amphitheatre in Mosswood Park, Oakland, California wearing bright pink jumpers emblazoned with large love heart designs. Hasslehoof introduces a song somewhat ironically as "spoken word," stating "the spoken word's called [pause] 'In My Butt.'" To which Geck adds "this song's about anal sex and how good it feels to take it up the arse."<sup>416</sup> Such a statement is a playful expression of sexual subjectivity from a differing perspective to heterosexual masculinity. One that is unusual if taken in context with the overtly masculine nature of the punk community noted earlier. These lyrics also demonstrate a positive embrace of female sexuality that is a notable characteristic of third wave feminism.<sup>417</sup>

### **Bedroom artists: Gooley's use of Internet media and the feminist subcultural importance of the private sphere**

Gooley On The Inside maintained a Blogger page that now remains as an archive of the initiative's activities. Blogger is an online platform for the publishing of blogs, or personal websites in which users can post dated, diary-like short written entries. Blog posts can include the use of HTML (hypertext markup language), and subsequently this allows for the posting of images, video and hyperlinks. Blogs emerged in the mid-

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<sup>416</sup> holly fluxx [pseud.], "BAADDD in the USA are SO COOL!!" GOOEY ON THE INSIDE, entry posted July 14, 2009, accessed December 22, 2017, <http://goeeyontheinside.blogspot.com.au/2009/07/baaddd-in-usa-are-so-cool.html>.

<sup>417</sup> Melanie Waters, "Sexing It Up?: Women, Pornography and Third Wave Feminism," in *Third Wave Feminism: A Critical Exploration*, eds. Stacy Gillis, Gillian Howie, and Rebecca Munford (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 257-259.

1990s, an evolution of the way in which previous users of the Internet had posted dated entries on Internet forums and chatboards.<sup>418</sup> Blogger, the service that Gooley used for their blog was developed by the US company Pyra Labs in 1999 and acquired by Google in 2003. The platform helped popularise the blog format which by the mid-2000s had entered mainstream popularity.<sup>419</sup>

Gooley's Blogger page is designed in bright neon greens and pinks. The page features a mix of news regarding shows and performance documentation, as well as general blog posts related to music, queer and feminist politics. For instance, there are posts linking to new music videos by artists of interest to Gooley such as the British electronic musician and visual artist MIA. One post from 2010 discusses MIA's politically charged music video for "Born Free" (2010) and how its graphic content led to censorship of the video by YouTube.<sup>420</sup> There are blog posts on fashion designers, short written pieces expressing political opinions, and posts discussing issues such as racism in Melbourne creative communities.<sup>421</sup> An analogy between the role of the fanzine and the blog can be drawn. Like fanzines, Gooley's blog featured a disparate variety of content, and could act as a window into the community of the initiative through the private space of the bedroom. The arrival of Internet platforms such as Blogger and Myspace allowed feminist music initiatives such as Gooley to expand upon the tactics of building a DIY music community that the riot grrrl movement had developed with fanzines.

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<sup>418</sup> An early example of a blog-like webpage is in fact Australian, the Australian Net Guide page published in 1996. Jeremy Horey, "Australian Net Guide," Internet Archive Wayback Machine, accessed December 22, 2017, <https://web.archive.org/web/19961112042649/http://netguide.aust.com/daily/index.html>.

<sup>419</sup> Forbes, "Google Goes Blog-Crazy," *Forbes*, February 18, 2003, accessed January 5, 2018, [https://www.forbes.com/2003/02/18/cx\\_ah\\_0218google.html#3b8af99528e7](https://www.forbes.com/2003/02/18/cx_ah_0218google.html#3b8af99528e7).

<sup>420</sup> stickers [pseud.], "MIA Born Free Video ...amazing hot cool important real" GOOEY ON THE INSIDE, entry posted April 28, 2010, accessed December 22, 2017, <http://goeeyontheinside.blogspot.com.au/2010/04/mia-born-free-video-amazing-hot-cool.html>.

<sup>421</sup> stickers [pseud.], "to all whites.... by battle" GOOEY ON THE INSIDE, entry posted August 24, 2010, accessed December 22, 2017, <http://goeeyontheinside.blogspot.com.au/2010/08/calling-all-whites-call-out-by-battle.html>.

The link between fanzines and online spaces has been made before with reference to riot grrrl culture, and the appearance of riot grrrl inspired websites in the 1990s. Leonard has discussed how some of these webpages used the terminology “grrrl” and expressed similar feminist concerns regarding a discourse around a sense of place. However, these websites represented an expanded use of the term “grrrl” by the end of the 1990s. Some “grrrls” making online diaristic e-zine’s, in the tradition of riot grrrl fanzine culture, did not necessarily maintain a connection to the original music movement. Leonard notes:

The Internet allows international access to the riot grrrl initiative and a migration of its ideas across new political and ideological terrains. As Amelia DeLoach comments, ‘Like the Riot grrrls, the grrrls on the Web don’t have a neatly defined central purpose. In many ways, both the online and offline movement are like the web itself – diffuse’<sup>422</sup>

While I have discussed above the nature of physical events presented by Gooey, not all aspects of Gooey’s practices foregrounded events in public space. Here I would like to examine in particular Gooey’s use of online platforms, accessed from home or private spaces. While Gooey’s physical activities of gigs and events served a local community of musicians and artists in Melbourne, it is worth noting the global reach of the initiative accessible through their online activities. Viewing a visitation counter of their now defunct blog in 2017, it is noteworthy that the largest visitation of the blog by far is in fact from the US, reaching nearly 10,000 visits, as opposed to Australia’s almost 2,500 visits.<sup>423</sup> Reflecting on the Internet and Myspace’s impact, Childs observes that

there are certain people who might kind of implicitly feel comfortable in the [...] public domain, and they are often [...], you know, confident straight white

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<sup>422</sup> Leonard, 112.

<sup>423</sup> Cubby and Childs.

men or something like that, kind of the punk people that I was exposed to, or always seeing on stage [...] a lot of the people that we knew [...] were like bedroom artists. Girls and non-binary [gender] queers who just hang out in their bedroom and make music and so the Internet and Myspace was really a space for connecting those kinds of people [...] and also people with disability [...] people who might not necessarily be comfortable [...] in what would normally be seen as like a performance space.<sup>424</sup>

This point is important not only in articulating the widening of audiences that social media enabled for DIY music practices, but for the way in which initiatives such as Goovey highlighted existing hierarchies in traditional punk and DIY communities. Despite their rhetoric around access, DIY communities such as the Melbourne punk scene were susceptible to social hierarchies restricting access on the basis of gender and sexuality. The arrival of Internet social media platforms such as Myspace served to give greater agency to those excluded to build their own communities from the private space of the bedroom. The notion of the “bedroom artist” noted in Childs’ comments is an important concept to discuss. This concept has a precedent in discussions surrounding the subcultural practices of women, as well as in the riot grrrl movement.

In the late 1970s cultural studies scholars Jenny Garber and Angela McRobbie considered the absence or “invisibility” of women from cultural studies accounts of post-war British subcultures. Garber and McRobbie comment that due to societal expectations on women of the time, the “working class girl, though temporarily at work, remained more focused on home, Mum and marriage than her brother or his male peers.”<sup>425</sup> This expectation ran in contrast to subcultures such as Teddy Boy culture, which was played out publicly by men predominantly, on the street or at the

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<sup>424</sup> Childs, interview by Davis.

<sup>425</sup> Jenny Garber and Angela McRobbie, “Girls and Subcultures,” in *Resistance through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain*, eds. Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson (London: Routledge, 2003), eBook collection (ProQuest Ebook Central), 213.

café.<sup>426</sup> Garber and McRobbie note however that there was place for an appropriation of subcultural activities among girls in the private sphere of the home. They comment that:

There was room for a good deal of the new teenage consumer culture *within* the ‘culture of the bedroom’—experimenting with make-up, listening to records, reading the mags, sizing up the boyfriends, chatting, jiving: it depended, rather, on some access by girls to room and space within (rather than outside) *the home*—even if the room was uneasily shared with an older sister.”<sup>427</sup>

This focus on the private sphere discussed by Garber and McRobbie was evidently still present among the subcultural activities of young women in decades to come. The bedroom or private sphere was particularly important to the practices of the riot grrrl movement. For the development of zines, a central aspect of riot grrrl culture, the bedroom was a key site of cultural production. On this point Leonard comments that

the private sphere is integral rather than incidental to the text itself. Whereas previous music fanzines have been responses to an external (street or club) culture, here the culture is produced in the very act of writing. The multiplicitous nature of riot grrrl and the accompanying rhetoric of inclusion – ‘We are *not* a club and there are no rules’ (*Riot grrrl* #8: 14) – encourages anyone to identify with the network and contribute to its expansion.<sup>428</sup>

So for Leonard, riot grrrl’s foregrounding of the zine as a window into the private sphere makes for a key point of difference to previous fanzine cultures. Where male-dominated subcultures focused their activities on live music venues and the “street or club,” the fanzines of riot grrrls made their focus the private sphere, long a site of subcultural activity for young women. The concerns of riot grrrl zine publishers

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<sup>426</sup> Ibid.

<sup>427</sup> Ibid.

<sup>428</sup> Leonard, 107.



regarding inclusivity and the male-dominated nature of public subcultures echo those of Gooey. Moreover, a “retreat” into the private sphere, as feminist scholar Anita Harris has noted, can serve as a tactic in response to the commodification of young girls’ subcultural practices. This is a point that Harris raises regarding the 1990s major entertainment industries’ cooptation of the term “girl power.” Harris states:

For these young women [“grrrl” fanzine makers], underground magazines operate as a site for politics and a place for debating and refiguring young women’s place in a post-industrial world, but they must remain marginal and ‘private.’ They have emerged as a site for youth politics, and young women’s politics in particular, because they operate outside the scrutiny of new regulatory regimes.<sup>429</sup>

This is a tendency however that is complicated with the collapse of the private and public spheres as a general pattern in consumption since the development of neoliberalism. In my first case study, the Clifton Hill Community Music Centre offered an example that was very much situated within the public (“community”) sphere. A shift in the consumption of music is evident in the following case study on the *Fast Forward* initiative’s use of the cassette. As discussed in Chapter Three with regard to the cassette and specifically the Sony Walkman, the merging of private activities into the public sphere is characteristic of a post-industrial foregrounding of the individual and private life. In this chapter I wish to further interrogate this collapse of the private and public spheres under neoliberalism, as it relates in particular to a feminist DIY initiative such as Gooey and their use of media.

### **Cyberfeminism: the feminist use of Internet spaces in Australia**

For a contemporary feminist music initiative such as Gooey, use of both online and offline media are interdependent. The Internet has from its early inception provided a

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<sup>429</sup> Harris, 134.

means for individuals of marginalised identities to create alternate spaces to support one another in daily life as well as in creative practices. In the early years of the Web this consisted of the conception of virtual alternatives to physical spaces of prejudice. This utopian moment of optimism for an alternative feminist “cyberspace” online was dramatised in Australia by media art collective VNS Matrix. Founded in Adelaide in 1991, VNS Matrix was the collective of artists Josephine Starrs, Julianne Pierce, Francesca da Rimini and Virginia Barratt. Seeking to counter the patriarchal hierarchies experienced in offline spaces, their 1991 *Cyberfeminist Manifesto* delivered an early treatise on the utopian potentials for feminist spaces online, and operated as a call to arms for women to engage with the new technologies available through the early World Wide Web.<sup>430</sup> Da Rimini notes that VNS Matrix set about in “creating a new kind of feminism which was going to be relevant for women, young women, women our age and older women in the nineties, and we called our project Cyberfeminism.”<sup>431</sup> VNS Matrix advocated for women’s relationship to new Internet technologies, both in considering a utopian potential, as well as seeking to address existing negative portrayals of women and their absence in computer magazines and the like. This advocacy resulted in a global interest in “cyberfeminism.”<sup>432</sup> The original cyberfeminist manifesto, in its language and colourful presentation making use of 3D computer-generated art, was intentionally playful. It featured phrases claiming to be “saboteurs of big daddy mainframe” and proclaiming “we are the future cunt.”<sup>433</sup> The manifesto was photocopied and posted across Adelaide and Sydney, where it was displayed at Tin Sheds Gallery as a billboard in 1992.<sup>434</sup> Furthermore, it was distributed online and translated into numerous languages.<sup>435</sup>

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<sup>430</sup> Tofts, *Interzone*, 48.

<sup>431</sup> Ibid.

<sup>432</sup> Ibid., 48-49.

<sup>433</sup> Rhizome, “A Cyberfeminist Manifesto for the 21st Century | Net Art Anthology,” Rhizome, accessed December 21, 2017, <https://anthology.rhizome.org/a-cyber-feminist-manifesto-for-the-21st-century>.

<sup>434</sup> Ibid. Tofts, *Interzone*, 48.

<sup>435</sup> Ibid.

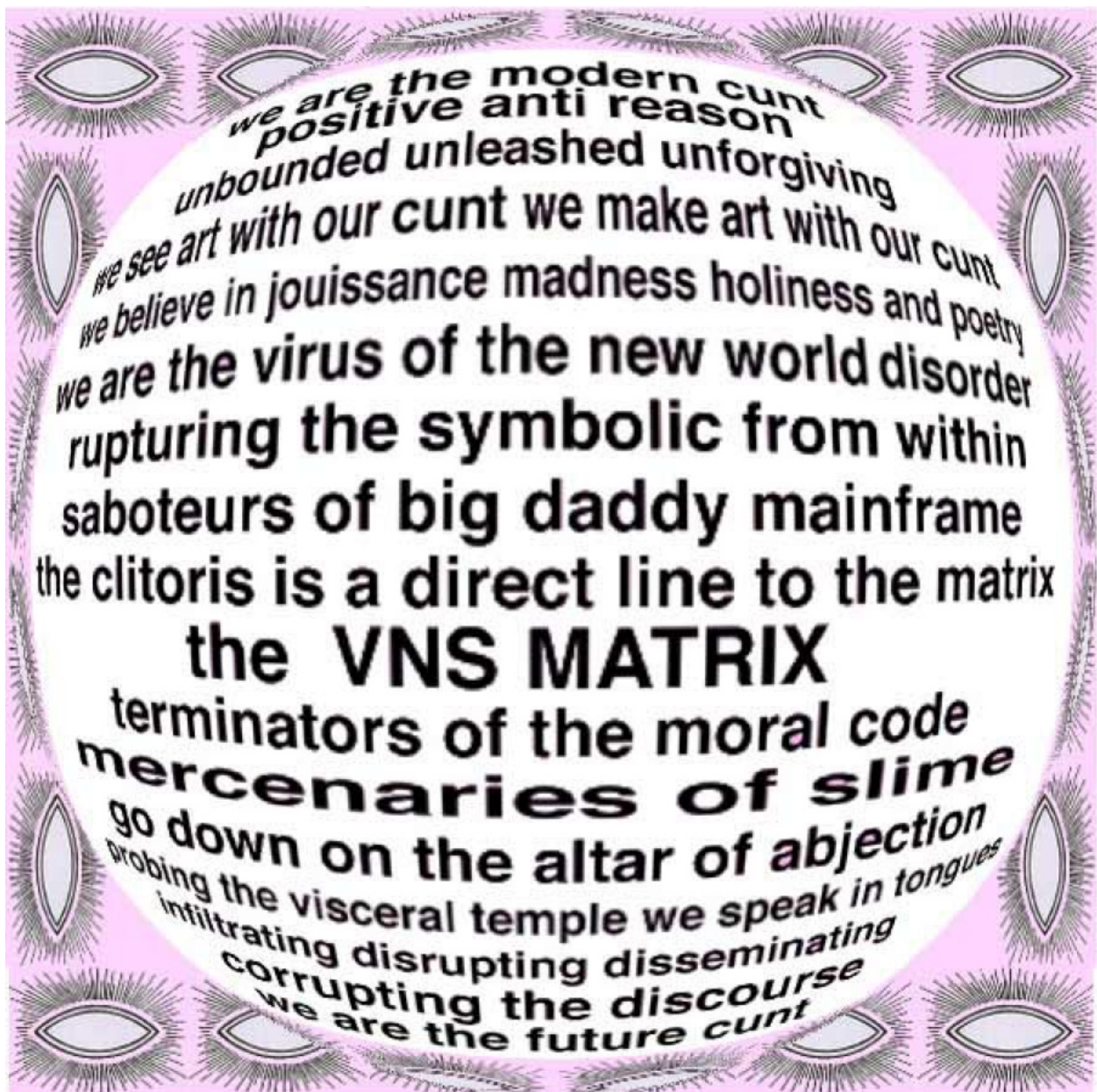


Figure 17. VNS Matrix, "A Cyberfeminist Manifesto for the 21st Century," 1991.

Alongside her work with VNS Matrix, da Rimini was also a pioneer in online hypertext fiction, or role-playing "choose your own adventure" stories that are navigated through hyperlinks online. One example, da Rimini's text-based online role-playing fiction "I Am My Own Freakshow" (1994), invites readers into a "baroque Venetian villa overlooking a leafy canal. This is the sanctuary of the Puppet Mistress

and Her enslaved companions Holly and Claude. A place of beauty and sadness.”<sup>436</sup>  
Media arts academic Darren Tofts claims of these works that

da Rimini was particularly interested in the role-playing aspect of such domains, their promotion of play, anonymity and the ability to take on different identities. As a cyberfeminist and founding member of VNS Matrix, the concept of identity as multiplicity appealed to her conviction that the online environment was a space in which social stereotypes of gender could be totally redefined<sup>437</sup>

This is a relation to place and identity not unlike the “grrrls” discussed above by Leonard. Writers on “grrrl” websites used language that evoked a sense of place for their visitors, continuing the diaristic nature of riot grrrl fanzine culture and references to private spaces.<sup>438</sup> One example of this given by Leonard is a 1996 website titled “ratgrrrls’ hideout,” authored by Megan Larson. The language of “home” and private space is evoked in Larson’s introductory text to the website

welcome to the new, improved ratgrrrls’ hideout. I’ve rearranged the furniture a bit, but it’s still the same old place, honest ... stay as long as you like – you don’t even need to know the secret handshake to get in (but if you’re really nice, I might teach it to you).<sup>439</sup>

Gooley On The Inside do not identify in their literature directly with cyberfeminism. However, in my analysis their activities can be grounded within a continuation of the discourse around cyberfeminist practice. This is evident in their positions in relation to prior 1990s feminist practices, their rave-inspired aesthetic with its techno-utopian qualities as well as their use of online spaces such as Blogger and Myspace.

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<sup>436</sup> Ibid., 122.

<sup>437</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>438</sup> Leonard, 112.

<sup>439</sup> Ibid.

## **Music distribution on the Internet in Australia and the birth of “prosumption”**

The uptake of Internet usage in Melbourne by musicians and its role in music distribution was not a sudden one. I am interested here in tracing how the private sphere as a site for the production and distribution of music has evolved for Melbourne DIY musicians from cassette media and mailing lists, to the use of Myspace and Blogger by initiatives such as Gooey.

The relationship between media and technology and public versus private modes of DIY music production has been discussed throughout this thesis. Recall my prior discussions of the way in which 4-track cassette recorders began to realise amateur musicians’ desires to cut out the intermediary figures of studios for recording demos. By the late 1980s marketing rhetoric for audio technology had caught on to the changes surrounding the once solely public activity of attempting to get a “big break” and audience in music. The path to exposure that traditionally occurred through gigging at clubs or recording demos in professional studios had moved into private, or home spaces. For instance, a 1987 Yamaha multitrack recorder commercial ran the headline in their advertisements: “Go to your room and play.”<sup>440</sup> For the Australian cassette culture of the 1980s and its mail networks, the ability to produce networks and audiences for musicians enabled greater access without the need of record labels’ distribution. Cassette culture discourse was often one of economic concerns, or of critiquing the need for financial resources to get noticed, signed, or appeal to the tastes of wealthy record labels. Gooey has demonstrated however that Melbourne’s DIY music communities had further exclusions due to identity rather than simply economic means. Foregrounding private space as a site of production has enabled the development of small but inclusive new communities of DIY musicians for those of marginalised identities.

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<sup>440</sup> Jones, 79.

The rise of Internet social media platforms has had a distinct impact on the way in which DIY music communities organise. As I noted in the previous chapter, by the late 1990s online forums were established among existing indie music communities that had initially formed through mail orders, gigging and fanzine networks. By the mid-2000s, as was evidenced by Goovey's online presence, the emergence of social media and in particular Myspace complicated the nature of DIY subcultural music practice. Today's subcultural networks, developed in private spaces, are tied to the use of Internet platforms for which the private sphere is a dominant new space of consumption.

Founded in 2003, Myspace is a social networking website that grew in popularity not only as a social network tool for friends, but for musicians who took advantage of the site's features for creating band pages and embedded music streaming and downloading. This extended across indie and punk music scenes with a history of DIY practice, as well as more mainstream genres. A number of the artists affiliated with Goovey, as well as the initiative itself, maintained Myspace pages.

In order to establish a context for this use of Internet platforms by Goovey and their affiliated musicians, I want to first outline the developments of digital and online music distribution in Australia. In doing so I analyse its effects on music consumption, as well as the free sharing of intellectual property more generally. This free sharing of information—most notably through the pirated distribution of music via the Internet—became a prominent public debate by the late 1990s, with the radical popularity of the MP3 file format.

The Internet quickly revolutionised music consumption with its decentralised, digital distribution, and the compressed audio file format of the MP3 was singularly important in this cultural change. MP3 is short for MPEG-1 (Motion Picture Experts Group), Layer 3. Founded in 1988, the Motion Picture Experts Group was initiated as a working group to standardise compression formats for telecommunications and

consumer electronics.<sup>441</sup> By 1992 the MPEG standard that was developed included a number of different protocols for encoding audio; these were termed “layers.”<sup>442</sup> Compression of digital sound files is necessary to allow for the smaller file sizes needed for storage, and for the transfer of files particularly during the slower download speeds of the early Internet and World Wide Web. Originally, large companies such as Philips and Panasonic adopted MPEG’s Layer 2 format, putting it in favour of Layer 3. However Layer 3 had the advantage of producing smaller file sizes, crucial for file sharing on the early Web. Where in the 2010s a song encoded as a Layer 2 file can take seconds to download via a cable, DSL or a mobile 3G Internet connection, in 1993 and 1994 this could take around half an hour via dial up Internet.<sup>443</sup>

As MPEG-1 Audio Layer 3 is a proprietary standard, commercial ventures that make use of it must pay licensing fees to the format’s rights holders after earning a certain amount of revenue.<sup>444</sup> However, piracy and free Internet distribution has long been associated with the MP3 format, and an unintentional run-in with piracy can be credited in part for the ubiquity of the format by the late 1990s. After the release of official software for encoding and decoding Layer 3 audio in 1994, an Australian hacker managed to reverse engineer this software’s copy protection, redistributing it as a free codec online.<sup>445</sup> As media and sound studies academic Jonathan Sterne observes, rather than damaging the future of the MP3, this hack led to the greater prevalence and dominance of the format.<sup>446</sup>

It is not surprising that it was an Australian who committed this hack of the MP3 encoding software. Australia, and particularly Melbourne, held a unique global position in the late 1980s and early 1990s emerging Internet underground and

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<sup>441</sup> Jonathan Sterne, “The MP3 as Cultural Artifact,” *New Media & Society* 8, no. 5 (2006): 829.

<sup>442</sup> Sterne, *MP3: The Meaning of a Format*, 23.

<sup>443</sup> *Ibid.*, 198-202.

<sup>444</sup> *Ibid.*, 26-27.

<sup>445</sup> *Ibid.*, 201-202.

<sup>446</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

computer hacking scenes. In 1989, a computer “worm,” or self-replicating piece of malware, infected NASA’s network. The worm claimed that it was deleting system files, although this was a false scare. It displayed an ASCII art message on computer systems as NASA staff in the US, Europe and Japan logged on: “WORMS AGAINST NUCLEAR KILLERS – WANK – Your System Has Been Officially WANKed.” Below this message was the phrase: “You talk of times of peace for all, and then prepare for war.”<sup>447</sup> The humour of the worm’s title was lost on the American staff receiving the message, who were not familiar with the Australian colloquialism “wank.” Not knowing from where the infection to their computer systems had come, NASA staff likely missed the connection also regarding the worm’s inclusion of song lyrics from the popular Australian rock band Midnight Oil.<sup>448</sup> An international investigation traced the source of the worm to Australia, however the hackers responsible were never caught.<sup>449</sup> Cyber security researcher Suelette Dreyfus has discussed how the Australian hacker community emerged in the late 1980s, prior to the arrival of the World Wide Web, through networked electronic bulletin board systems (or “BBS”). These were networks made with newly affordable personal computers such as the Apple IIe and the Commodore 64, now connected with modems.<sup>450</sup> Dreyfus notes that in 1988 Melbourne had between 60 and 100 BBSs operating,<sup>451</sup> run by users ranging from teenage computer enthusiasts, university students through to white collar professionals moonlighting as weekend computer hobbyists.<sup>452</sup> Melbourne, Dreyfus notes, for reasons difficult to ascertain was the centre of activity for BBS users. Among this emerging computer underground was the young hacker Julian Assange, famed two decades later for his founding of the Wikileaks whistleblower journalism organisation.<sup>453</sup> Assange also had a link to the

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<sup>447</sup> Suelette Dreyfus, *Underground: Tales of Hacking, Madness & Obsession on the Electronic Frontier* (Kew, VIC: Mandarin/Reed Books, 1997), 6.

<sup>448</sup> *Ibid.*, 6-7.

<sup>449</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>450</sup> *Ibid.*, 50-51.

<sup>451</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>452</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.



aforementioned rave scene, developing audio-visual installations for Melbourne rave parties in the early 1990s.<sup>454</sup>

In 1995, the MP3 format was given its abbreviated title and suffix “.mp3,” as a considered marketing decision by its developers. This occurred the same year that telecommunications company Telstra acquired the infrastructure of the Internet in Australia and commercial use of the Internet began to grow dramatically in the country.<sup>455</sup> As Sterne notes:

An MP3 was a thing, like a .doc or a .pdf. Naming the format helped demystify and make banal digital audio for users: your word processor documents are .docs, your spreadsheets are .xlss, and your music files are MP3s.<sup>456</sup>

Sterne comments that major record labels were largely absent and slow to act with regard to the growing wave of online music distribution and the MP3. When the Recording Industry Association of America did finally act, it was in an attempt to curb distribution of files online, in a 1997 lawsuit against illegal FTP (file transfer protocol) websites. This lack of real engagement, Sterne claims, helped the technology companies and web developers mould the direction of the format, rather than the recording industry.<sup>457</sup> At this point in 1997, the MP3 and (often illegal) file sharing was well on its way to ubiquity. Websites such as MP3.com began to emerge to share files. As noted by Sterne, by the beginning of 1998 “MP3” was the second most popular search term on the Internet globally, and the most popular by 1999. That same year, Napster was founded, providing software and a network with a user-friendly, searchable interface for peer-to-peer MP3 sharing. Napster was used by at least 7

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<sup>453</sup> Wikileaks, “What Is Wikileaks?” Wikileaks, accessed January 5, 2018, <https://wikileaks.org/What-is-Wikileaks.html>.

<sup>454</sup> THUMP Specials/Vice Media, “The Birth of Melbourne's Rave Scene” (online video), published October 27, 2015, accessed December 21, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bchDMztcd4o>.

<sup>455</sup> Roger Clarke, “Origins and Nature of the Internet in Australia,” Roger Clarke's ‘The Internet in Australia,’ accessed December 21, 2017, <http://www.rogerclarke.com/II/OzI04.html>.

<sup>456</sup> Sterne, *MP3: The Meaning of a Format*, 202-203.

<sup>457</sup> *Ibid.*, 203.

million people, although Napster claimed their software was downloaded by 28 million. Ultimately, Napster was faced with a high profile lawsuit in 2000 from the Recording Industry Association of America.<sup>458</sup>

The release of Apple's iPod portable music player in 2001 was a further milestone for music's digital presence and the increasing pressure on the music industry to adapt. The iPod introduced a system of synching music with users' computer-based personal libraries on Apple's iTunes software, sometimes containing music files encrypted in Apple's copy-proof format in an effort to curb the piracy of music files. The iPod only allowed for files to be transferred from a computer to the device, and not the other way around.<sup>459</sup> In 2003, finally, Apple's iTunes music store was introduced as a major and legal solution to digital music downloads. The service offers paid but relatively affordable downloads of albums and individual tracks, in a specific format with copy protection, and provides earnings to record labels.<sup>460</sup> At this stage, while Napster had shut down, file sharing protocols such as BitTorrent, which allowed users to share peer-to-peer with one another anonymously, presented a more sophisticated means for pirates to avoid services being closed by legal action.<sup>461</sup>

In the mid-2000s, a number of years after peer-to-peer sharing platforms such as Napster, upstart "social media" websites such as Myspace and YouTube began to emerge with a focus on user-generated content. This new participatory direction towards user-generated content and social media came to be popularly dubbed "Web 2.0," and brought with it the term "prosumption" for its merging of users' production and consumption.<sup>462</sup> Myspace, a social networking site founded in 2003, offered

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<sup>458</sup> Ibid., 206-207.

<sup>459</sup> Bobbie Johnson, "Apple Drops DRM Copy Protection from Millions of iTunes Songs," Tech, *The Guardian*, Tuesday January 7, 2009, accessed 1 February 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2009/jan/06/apple-drops-itunes-copy-protection>.

<sup>460</sup> Kembrew McLeod, "MP3s Are Killing Home Taping: The Rise of Internet Distribution and Its Challenge to the Major Label Music Monopoly," *Popular Music and Society* 28, no. 4 (October 2005): 526-527.

<sup>461</sup> Sterne, *MP3: The Meaning of a Format*, 207.

<sup>462</sup> Christian Fuchs, "Class and Exploitation on the Internet," in *Digital Labor: The Internet as Playground and Factory*, ed. Trebor Scholz (New York: Routledge, 2013), 217.

musicians free websites on which they could upload their own music for listeners around the world to stream. Myspace's ensuing global success helped usher in the popularity of streaming content, as well as a new era in which musicians can more easily distribute content to wide audiences independently and immediately. Myspace became an invaluable resource for independent musicians within the Melbourne experimental music community. The platform allowed artists to not only share and distribute their music to an international network, but Myspace's social networking functioned to solidify and develop music scenes. For example, Myspace's "Top 8" function meant visitors to an artist's page would not only encounter the artist's music, but a window into their creative community. The Myspace top 8 of Gooley On The Inside for instance includes links to the aforementioned groups BAADDD and Toxic Lipstick.<sup>463</sup> YouTube was first introduced in 2005 for the sharing of user-created video content with the motto "broadcast yourself." However it quickly became a popular space to share copyrighted music, either music videos, or sometimes audio-only uploads with a still image such as cover art in place of a video.<sup>464</sup> YouTube has since developed agreements with major entertainment companies for content uploaded by their users, including the distribution of royalties earned from advertising on the site.<sup>465</sup>

Further developments in music streaming include the service SoundCloud, founded in 2008,<sup>466</sup> which is a more simplified user-generated music streaming service offering a reliable music player that can be embedded in external websites. Bandcamp, also

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<sup>463</sup> Gooley On The Inside, "Gooley On The Inside," Myspace, accessed December 21, 2017, <https://myspace.com/gooleyontheside>.

<sup>464</sup> Initially, YouTube was plagued with takedowns of videos, due to copyright claims by major entertainment companies. Viacom International became notorious for issuing copyright claims over YouTube videos and in 2007 sued Google, a case that was dismissed, appealed and ultimately settled in 2014. Jonathan Stempel, "Google, Viacom Settle Landmark YouTube Lawsuit," Technology News, *Reuters*, Wednesday March 19, 2014, accessed February 1, 2017, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-google-viacom-lawsuit-idUSBREA2H11220140318>.

<sup>465</sup> Mark Savage, "YouTube's \$1bn Royalties Are Not Enough, Says Music Industry," *Entertainment & Arts, BBC News*, Wednesday December 7, 2016, accessed February 1, 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-38235834>.

<sup>466</sup> SoundCloud, "About SoundCloud on SoundCloud," accessed February 1, 2017, <https://soundcloud.com/pages/contact>.

launched in 2007, furthermore offers free streaming and an option for musicians to set their own fee for paid downloads.<sup>467</sup>

Crucial to my analysis in this chapter is the new importance of the private sphere for DIY music practitioners, particularly as evident in the feminist practices of Gooey On The Inside. The way in which DIY musicians made use of media that amplified private spaces such as the bedroom as a site of production, as with fanzines and mailing networks, was prophetic of the manner in which Web 2.0 platforms foreground the private sphere. Web 2.0 platforms in turn have been adopted by DIY music initiatives such as Gooey in place of fanzines and the older media. We can also see a link between the labour of online bedroom artists and the feminised creative labour of “passionate work,” theorised by Angela McRobbie and discussed in the previous chapter. For McRobbie, the gender of post-Fordism is female.<sup>468</sup> This observation is made on the one hand in relation to the prevalence in post-industrial work of “feminine” affective labour, regardless of the gender identity of the worker. On the other hand, it speaks to the rising engagement of female workers who have been drawn increasingly since the 1970s to a career away from traditional working class values. What’s more, this statement refers to the link between feminine labour and the private sphere examined earlier. In McRobbie’s comments on the gender of post-Fordism being “female” is the implication that the primary site of production and consumption is no longer public space, but the private sphere. This shift towards production in private environments is reflected early on in the DIY music practices of my thesis, and becomes particularly important in considering the bedroom artists affiliated with Gooey.

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<sup>467</sup> Stuart Dredge, “Bandcamp to Help Musicians Launch Their Own Subscription Services,” Tech, *The Guardian*, Tuesday November 11, 2014, accessed February 1, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2014/nov/11/bandcamp-musicians-subscription-services>.

<sup>468</sup> McRobbie, *Be Creative*, 78-79.

## Conclusion

In this chapter I have examined the Gooney On The Inside initiative and affiliated musicians, considering their relation to feminist subcultural practices. Gooney has been analysed in relation to the precedents of the riot grrrl movement in the US and concurrent feminist independent music initiative Rock ‘n’ Roll High School in Melbourne. Furthermore, I examined Gooney’s use of rave aesthetics—a movement that was inherently futuristic and grounded in techno-utopianism—in contrast to the previous chapter’s anti-technological indie authenticity. I discussed how the “cyberfeminist” artists VNS Matrix emerging in the early 1990s were a precursor in Australia for Gooney’s feminist embrace of Internet media.

I have examined the initiative’s use of Web 2.0 or social media platforms Myspace and Blogger, considering how such platforms, particularly blogging, offer a digital extension of the activities developed by DIY music initiatives with fanzine culture. In doing so, I have analysed the significance of the notion of the “bedroom artist” to Gooney’s activities. I examined how DIY music initiatives, and in particular feminist subcultural practices, were among early adopters of the shift in cultural production towards a new status of the private sphere.

I have argued that Gooney’s use of Web 2.0 platforms is a continuation of ways of using media and network development that were defined pre-Internet; namely in the fanzine cultures and mail networks of the cassette culture that I have discussed in this thesis. In the final chapter of my thesis I consider this trajectory further into the present, examining Melbourne artist and experimental musician Christopher LG Hill’s practice, particularly his use of Web 2.0 platforms.

## Chapter Six

### Christopher LG Hill and the Role of the Internet in Contemporary DIY Music Practice

On the recently defunct video-sharing platform Vine, the *Endless Lonely Planet III* page was something of an anomaly.<sup>469</sup> Vine was a social media website known for its proliferation of short comedy skits, viral videos, Internet memes and everyday clips shared between friends. “Vines,” or the short videos posted to the page, were limited to six seconds long. The *Endless Lonely Planet III* page featured 52 “Vines,” one for each week of the year, of audio works and accompanying visual content by a different experimental musician each week. In one post, Melbourne experimental musician and artist Christopher LG Hill was seen sitting on a deck chair, hunched over a microphone. Hill was performing here in the mid-2010s as Moffarfarrah, his experimental vocal music project. His vocal performance was noisily abstracted through effects pedals, looping hypnotically every six seconds. Produced to accompany the third issue of Hill’s *Endless Lonely Planet* zine, the Vine page worked with the platform’s restrictive parameters to produce a yearlong online project. Curated by Hill along with experimental musician Tim Coster, the Vine format presented a unique set of constraints to the musicians taking part. The project also presented a challenge to Vine’s intended purposes of providing short video snapshots of users’ daily lives. Instead, visitors to the now archived page are greeted with a lively window into the community of experimental musicians and artists with whom Hill works.

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<sup>469</sup> No longer accessible in its original form, the page was located at <http://vine.co/elp3>. Christopher LG Hill, “ENDLESS LONELY PLANET III VINE walk through video,” YouTube, accessed January 11, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=COD8EbCiHkg>.

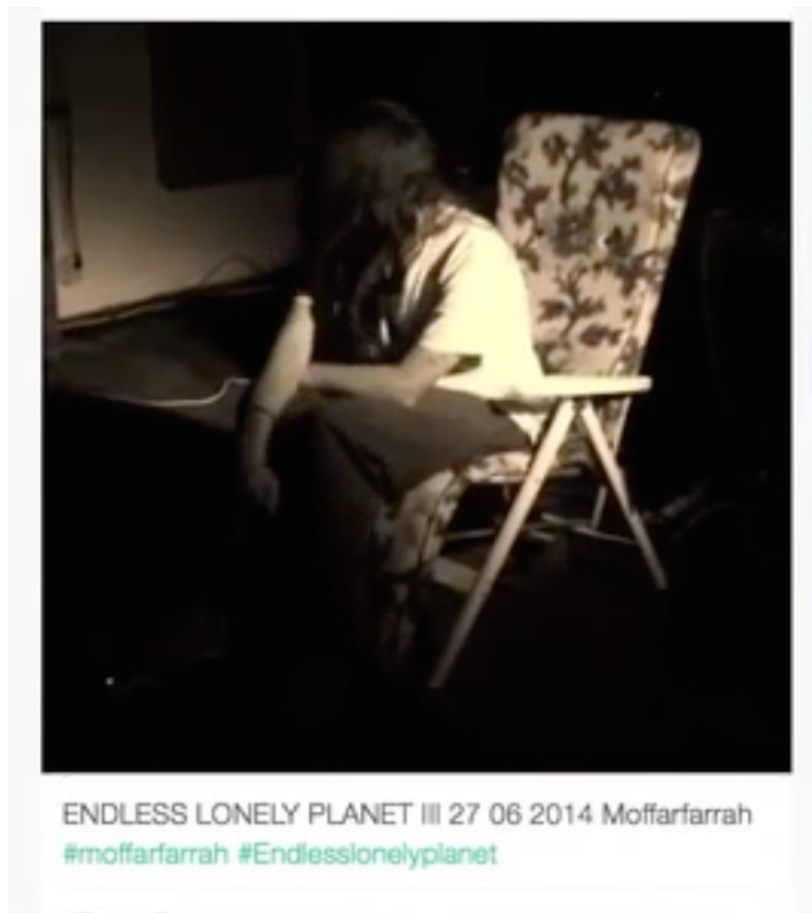


Figure 18. *Endless Lonely Planet III*, Vine, screen grab.

In this chapter I examine the interdisciplinary practice of Christopher LG Hill (1980–), as well as his network of collaborators, in order to analyse how the Internet has been adopted and used creatively by a contemporary DIY musician in Melbourne. In effect, this chapter considers the nature of DIY music production and distribution in the age of mature neoliberalism as well as in the digital economy. I specifically want to consider the phenomenon of “prosumption,” or the merging of consumption and production brought about by Internet platforms such as YouTube and SoundCloud, and how these platforms relate to Hill’s practice. I discuss how one of the consequences of these platforms is a flattening of the media space shared by DIY artists and the major entertainment industry. Furthermore, I argue that the social media platforms enabling contemporary DIY music practice online are indicative of a shift tracked throughout this thesis, from an emphasis in the culture of consumption from content to the platform. This shift was first seen in Chapter Three with the cassette. In

this chapter I examine Hill as exemplary of the way in which contemporary DIY musicians make use of Internet media. Hill's use of Internet media foregrounds community building along with a form of authenticity like what I first analysed with indie music. Exchange-value is not the focus for Hill, but rather the free sharing of content for community building. Hill's practice likewise reflects previously discussed DIY value systems that ascribe a kind of subcultural capital to that which is not bound to commercial interests. I analyse Hill's emphasis on collaboration, community and sharing, in consideration also with the increasingly globalised nature of DIY music scenes. As my concluding case study, the new globalised nature of DIY music practice in Melbourne represented by Hill stands in contrast to the highly local Clifton Hill Community Music Centre which began this thesis.

### **Christopher LG Hill and his interdisciplinary practice**

Hill is a Melbourne-based artist whose work extends across mixed media installation, music practices, a blogging and Twitter practice as well as concrete poetry. His work often involves collaboration with other artists from within both a local Melbourne community, as well as others from online networks. While my analysis in this chapter is primarily focused on Hill's musical practice, an introduction to the visual arts practices of Hill is relevant here. This is in order to establish the shared conceptual interests across his musical and contemporary art practices. Furthermore, I would like to consider Hill's interdisciplinary practice in context with an increasing convergence of music and visual practices on digital platforms.

Examples of Hill's visual art exhibition practice include his contribution to a major survey of Melbourne art at the National Gallery of Victoria, *Melbourne Now*, in 2013. For *Melbourne Now*, Hill contributed an exhibition within an exhibition of sorts, entitled *free temporal groupings*. This project featured contributions from Melbourne visual artists including Virginia Overell, Kate Meakin, Gian Manik, alongside fashion designers such as Melbourne-based practitioner Annie Wu. The exhibit consisted of scattered garments and found objects received from contributors, dispersed across the



gallery floor and overlapping with one another.<sup>470</sup> Hill's title for the project, *free temporal groupings*, is indicative of his interest in the rhetoric of "freedom" associated with anarchist activist practices. Hill maintains an interest in aspects of anarchism related to mutual aid and collectivism, without as he states it adhering to a concrete political dogma. This interest is enacted by a particular relationship in Hill's work to the use of found and repurposed content, be it images, objects or sounds, an "ignoring of private property," as well as a will to share his work for free.<sup>471</sup> The free sharing of content in such a manner is a deliberate action by Hill in order to enact his will to challenge copyright. Hill describes the various streams of his practice in terms of an "openness and a freeness [...] that connects to loose and broad kind of anarchist beliefs of mine."<sup>472</sup> This evocation of anarchism here is unspecific and not necessarily connected to a political theory of governance. Writing in 2017 he notes: "I propose that anarchism is already present in our everyday desires and interactions."<sup>473</sup> Interpersonal relations, communication and notions of community are a key aspect of Hill's interpretation of anarchism, or what he refers to more specifically in his case as "post-anarchism."<sup>474</sup> This is evident in his statement: "A starting point in the process of equality or anarchism is *friendship*, which can be understood as a relationship outside of economics."<sup>475</sup>

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<sup>470</sup> Hill has noted a kinship in his installation practice with the late 1960s "scatter" installations of American artist Robert Morris, citing Morris' interest in ceding full authorship and hence allowing "more of the world to enter the art" in Morris' words. With relation to his practice, Hill comments that the "blurring of authorship in the inclusion of other people's works or lack of maker in the case of found, often mass-produced objects, removes some sense of artist ego." This is a question about authorship that I will examine further in this chapter. Christopher LG Hill, "Freedom and Association" (master's exegesis, Monash University, 2017), 13-14.

National Gallery of Victoria, "Melbourne Now," National Gallery of Victoria, accessed December 22, 2017, <https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/melbournenow/projects/535.html>.

Christopher LG Hill, "Melbourne Now NGV 2013-14," February 2014, accessed December 22, 2017, <http://www.christopherlghill.com/2014/02/melbourne-now-ngv-2013-14.html>.

<sup>471</sup> Christopher LG Hill, interview by Jared Davis, Melbourne May 10, 2016, audio recording.

<sup>472</sup> Ibid.

<sup>473</sup> Christopher LG Hill, "Freedom and Association," 1.

<sup>474</sup> Ibid.

<sup>475</sup> Ibid.

Another example of this was Hill's staging of a "free store" at the then Fitzroy-based art spaces and studios of Gertrude Contemporary in 2013, since relocated to the northern Melbourne suburb of Preston.<sup>476</sup> The project, entitled *Free Feudal Barter Store*, featured found objects and sculptural works that the artist offered to visitors for free or in exchange (barter).<sup>477</sup> *Free Feudal Barter Store* was a reference to the anarchist activist practice of "free stores," in which goods are exchanged for free in order to challenge monetary market systems or the notion of private property. These stores emerged as a part of the 1960s US counterculture, first conceived by San Francisco anarchist theatre group The Diggers.<sup>478</sup> The concept saw a recent resurgence of interest when they re-emerged within the Occupy protests in New York and globally in 2011.<sup>479</sup> Writing for the exhibition's catalogue text, arts writer Chloe Wolifson notes that a question of authorship is raised here with Hill's work, observing that "the artist's hand (ambiguous to begin with due to the diverse origin of materials) is deliberately blurred during the course of the show."<sup>480</sup> I am interested in discussing the nature of authorship with regard to Hill's work later in this chapter, particularly with regard to what role technological media in Internet platforms plays in this question.

Further references to anarchist ideals are apparent in the exhibition's title with the term "feudal." In a recent interview with the artist, Hill noted an interest in what he identifies as the anarchist concern for "freedom of property."<sup>481</sup> In a sense such an interest also relates to the feudal society notion of the "commons" or common property not owned privately but for public use. This is a concept that has ties also to the anti-

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<sup>476</sup> Gertrude Contemporary, "About Gertrude Contemporary," accessed December 22, 2017, <http://www.gertrude.org.au/about>.

<sup>477</sup> Christopher LG Hill, "\*", accessed December 22, 2017, <http://www.christopherlghill.com/2013/08/free-feudal-barter-store-studio-12.html>.

Chloe Wolifson, *Christopher L.G. Hill - Free Feudal Barter Store*, catalogue text for exhibition at Gertrude Contemporary, 26 July – 26 September 2013, (Fitzroy, VIC: Gertrude Contemporary, 2013).

<sup>478</sup> The Diggers, "Free Store," The Diggers, accessed January 5, 2018, [http://www.diggers.org/free\\_store.htm](http://www.diggers.org/free_store.htm).

<sup>479</sup> Wolifson, 2.

<sup>480</sup> Ibid.

<sup>481</sup> Hill, interview by Davis.

hierarchical and anarchistic organisational practices of the nascent World Wide Web. The term has found usage in such online initiatives as Creative Commons, a digital age alternative for copyright that allows for the free sharing of licensed material under determined conditions. Furthermore the term appears in Wikimedia Commons, an online archive of free-to-use media such as stock images and sound.<sup>482</sup>



Figure 19. Christopher LG Hill, *Free Feudal Barter Store*, exhibition install view, Gertrude Contemporary, Fitzroy, July 26 –September 26, 2013. Photo credit: Kate Meakin.

As a curator, Hill's practice incorporates an aesthetically sprawling and maximalist approach, as well as a high degree of collaboration. An instance of this was Hill's curatorial project *The (self initiated, self funded) second (fourth) Y2K Melbourne Biennial of Art (and design)*, held in 2008 at the inner city Melbourne artist-run initiative TCB Art Inc. The exhibition's title is a play on the first official Melbourne

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<sup>482</sup> Olivia Rosane, "Back to the Land," *Real Life*, October 3, 2017, accessed December 22, 2017, <http://reallifemag.com/back-to-the-land/>.

International Biennial, held just prior to the new millennium, or ‘Y2K’, in 1999. Held in an eight-story disused telephone exchange in Melbourne’s city centre, the inaugural Biennial was curated by Juliana Engberg, former George Paton Gallery Director and later Director of the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art. It was to date the only official Melbourne International Biennial after failing to secure ongoing support from key partners.<sup>483</sup> For Hill’s biennial, the walls and floors of the small artist-run initiative TCB Art Inc. were covered with works, almost bleeding into one another as a combined installation not unlike the previous installations discussed above.<sup>484</sup>

Hill has since revisited similar experimental takes on the “biennial” exhibition. These include *The First & Final Y3K Second (third) Inaugural Melbourne Biennial of International Arts*—this sprawling name being a further play on the title of Hill’s previous “biennial” and its allusions to confused chronologies. Hill developed this “biennial” with artist and designer Joshua Petherick, as well as artist James Deutscher. Running between 14 May and 4 June 2011, the exhibition was the final project for the Y3K artist-run initiative, a two-year project space and curatorial project run by Deutscher and Hill at a converted warehouse space in Fitzroy. The gallery’s name seemingly alludes to the title of Hill’s first biennial, which Y3K press material has claimed was the “non-official inaugural Y3K exhibit.”<sup>485</sup> Y3K’s exhibitions featured work by Melbourne and international artists within Deutscher and Hill’s network, providing a space for interdisciplinary practice that spanned across visual art into design and architecture. The gallery’s inaugural exhibition for example was curated by ffiXXed, a Hong Kong and Shenzhen-based experimental fashion label, founded by Australian expats Fiona Lau and Kain Picken. Along with the work of Melbourne and

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<sup>483</sup>Frieze, “Signs of Life: Melbourne International Biennial,” Archive, *Frieze*, Internet Archive Wayback Machine, accessed December 22, 2017, [https://web.archive.org/web/20081202115637/http://www.frieze.com/issue/review/signs\\_of\\_life\\_melbourne\\_international\\_biennial](https://web.archive.org/web/20081202115637/http://www.frieze.com/issue/review/signs_of_life_melbourne_international_biennial).

Debbie Cuthbertson, “Engberg Draws Flak in Sydney,” Entertainment, *The Age*, Saturday April 19, 2014, accessed December 22, 2017, <http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/art-and-design/engberg-draws-flak-in-sydney-20140418-36w8g.html>.

<sup>484</sup> Christopher LG Hill, “Y2K Melbourne Bienial [*sic*]” November 2008, accessed December 22, 2017, <http://www.christopherlghill.com/2008/11/y2k-melbourne-bienial.html>.

<sup>485</sup> Y3K, “Y3K EXHIBITIONS,” accessed December 22, 2017, <http://y3kexhibitions.blogspot.com.au>.

international artists, the exhibition featured contributions from Berlin experimental fashion label BLESS and Melbourne art and architecture collective SIBLING.<sup>486</sup> Furthermore, Y3K hosted a physical site for the art and design bookstore World Food Books run by Petherick and artist Matt Hinkley, prior to its opening an inner city Melbourne store in 2011.<sup>487</sup> In Y3K's press statements and online material there is a consistent reference to the themes of "openness" and "community" that makes its way across Hill's art practice more generally.<sup>488</sup>

Hill has produced experimental music under various aliases. These include Moffarfarrah, a project in which the artist predominantly uses his voice in an unconventional or experimental manner, sometimes incorporating effects and sound processing. Performances under the alias of Moffarfarrah have taken place at gallery spaces such as the aforementioned Gertrude Contemporary (then Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces) for an exhibition and performance program that Hill curated at the gallery in 2006. As Moffarfarrah, Hill has also performed at artist-run initiatives including Forepaw in Northcote in 2007, along with backyard gigs.<sup>489</sup> Hill has released a number of Moffarfarrah recordings on cassette and vinyl. These include *Thread Bare*, a 7" vinyl release on Melbourne-based independent record label Albert's Basement (2013), and music on a cassette compilation titled *REBEL SORTS* (2013).<sup>490</sup> The aforementioned cassette was released on Hill's own Bunyip Trax label, founded with Petherick, which specialises in cassettes and CD-Rs.<sup>491</sup>

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<sup>486</sup> Y3K, "Y3K EXHIBITIONS: May 2009," Y3K, May 2009, accessed December 22, 2017, <http://y3kexhibitions.blogspot.com.au/2009/05>.

<sup>487</sup> Y3K, "WORLD FOOD BOOKS OPENS," Y3K, April 2010, accessed December 23, 2017, <http://y3kgallery.blogspot.com.au/2010/04/world-food-books-opens.html>. Pieces of Victoria, "Melbourne's best specialty bookshops," Pieces of Victoria, August 28, 2014, accessed December 23, 2017, <http://www.piecesofvictoria.com/2014/08/melbournes-best-specialty-bookshops>.

<sup>488</sup> Emily Bour, "Y3K Gallery Is Closing," *Broadsheet*, May 25, 2011, accessed December 23, 2017, <https://www.broadsheet.com.au/melbourne/art-and-design/article/y3k-gallery-closing>.

<sup>489</sup> Christopher LG Hill, "Christopher LG Hill," accessed December 23, 2017, <http://www.christopherlghill.com>.

<sup>490</sup> Albert's Basement, "Thread Bare," Bandcamp, accessed December 23, 2017, <https://albertsbasement.bandcamp.com/album/thread-bare>. Bunyip Trax, "Bunyip Trax," Bandcamp, accessed December 23, 2017, <https://bunyiptrax.bandcamp.com/>.

<sup>491</sup> Cooper Bowman, "Scum Mecca #3," *Crawlspac Magazine*, January 18, 2013, accessed December 25, 2017, <https://crawlspacemagazine.com/2013/01/18/scum-mecca-3>.

Another musical alias of Hill's is Porpoise Torture. As Porpoise Torture, Hill makes freeform noise using electronics such as effects pedals along with processed sounds from cassette tapes. On his use of physical media such as cassettes, seemingly at a glance an anachronistic choice for an artist with a tendency towards online and digital practices, Hill notes that "I use tape because of the immediacy of it, because of [...] the hands on kind of approach to it."<sup>492</sup> This is a statement that brings to mind the interest in craft and the handmade that is prevalent in the indie music and fanzine cultures discussed in Chapter Four. Throughout this chapter I am particularly interested in examining how such notions of indie authenticity have translated into the digital age, and what this means for the way in which DIY musicians use media. For Hill, the use of Internet platforms is likewise in some ways an extension of the culture of dissemination that arose from fanzine media.<sup>493</sup>

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<sup>492</sup> Hill, interview by Davis.

<sup>493</sup> Ibid.



Figure 20. Poster design by Christopher LG Hill for a gig at Forepaw gallery, Northcote, 2007.

### Hill's use of found and repurposed content

Across both the visual and musical projects discussed above, Hill's practice has a tendency to draw from found and repurposed content. This is evident especially in his use of Internet platforms. An exemplary work demonstrating Hill's use of found content and Internet platforms is the concrete poem *another you, a picture, a voice, a message, mime*. The work was originally published in 2010 by the Y3K artist-run initiative. Hill describes the piece as an "erotic novella/poem."<sup>494</sup> The poem exists online in its current form, hosted on the Google-owned blogging platform, Blogger,

<sup>494</sup> Christopher LG Hill, "another you, a picture, a voice message, mime," accessed February 1, 2017, <https://anotheryouapictureavoicemessagemime.blogspot.com.au/>.

with each word or phrase in the poem hyperlinked to an external website. These links are “both live and dead [,] relevant and irrelevant,”<sup>495</sup> demonstrating both the archival as well as ever-changing and ephemeral nature of online spaces. Content in the poem ranges from popular culture and music references, mundane nouns and phrases, sexual connotations, to the names of other artists, writers and musicians (some of whom are affiliates of Hill). These words appear in one continuous block of text in a stream of consciousness style. For example:

.....Swastikas Anarchist symbols smiley faces burned in soft skinny arms protruding bones a stomach ulcer a diet malnu-trision neglect words strung to her in a cool unaffected ambience she was neglected she had done a lot for the world but never given much thought to her role in this she was tired in a very aware way and really quite happy Power ambience SS Dolphin wife sea mammal in bondage porpoise torture tap fish Love hunger oyster flip mobile phones Urchyns flipping out oyster phones scaffolding UK pop singers glaze natural selection strawberry champagne jeggings melancholy [...]<sup>496</sup>

The poem demonstrates Hill’s use of found content with an “open” anti-copyright ethos, in which the source material is freely used and at times appropriated to take on new meanings. “Open” in this context, can be related to the concept of the open web, or a broad notion of the Internet as a tool for information, knowledge and intellectual property being shared and developed free of copyright and monetary restrictions.

Hill’s disavowal of copyright is in line with the significant effect the Internet has had on copyright and notions of intellectual property, introduced in the previous chapter with regard to the MP3. This is particularly relevant to my research in the sense that such developments are key to any discussion of music as commodity in the digital age. Quite unlike the mass produced and sold copies of records that Attali discussed of the

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<sup>495</sup> Ibid.

<sup>496</sup> Ibid.



20th century, music commodities in the digital age cannot be reduced to pure exchange-value. For Richard Barbrook, since its inception the Internet has fostered a commons of free information, in what he terms “the hi-tech gift economy.” As Barbrook states: “Far from wanting to enforce copyright, the pioneers of the Net tried to eliminate all barriers to the distribution of scientific research.”<sup>497</sup> Nonetheless, for Barbrook this is a gift economy that is readily compromised by commercial cooptation.<sup>498</sup> This need to reconsider copyright and private intellectual property is something ingrained in the very architecture of the Internet. As inventor of the World Wide Web Tim Berners-Lee, quoted by Barbrook, notes:

Concepts of intellectual property, central to our culture, are not expressed in a way which maps onto the abstract information space. In an information space, we can consider the authorship of materials, and their perception; but ... there is a need for the underlying infrastructure to be able to make copies simply for reasons of [technical] efficiency and reliability. The concept of ‘copyright’ as expressed in terms of copies made makes little sense.<sup>499</sup>

Subsequently throughout the 1990s, the expression “information wants to be free” became something of a slogan for technology activists advocating for information and knowledge to be freely available via the Internet. The phrase dates back to 1984 and is attributed to journalist and entrepreneur Stewart Brand. In the 1960s Brand was linked to the counterculture through his writing and publication of the Whole Earth Catalog, a countercultural mail order catalogue.<sup>500</sup> Throughout the 1980s Brand became affiliated with a growing number of US West Coast entrepreneurs who saw in the Internet a potential for putting into practice the rhetoric of collectivism that the 1960s counterculture embraced. Barbrook and media theorist Andy Cameron had by 1995

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<sup>497</sup> Richard Barbrook, “The Hi-Tech Gift Economy.”

<sup>498</sup> Ibid.

<sup>499</sup> Ibid.

<sup>500</sup> John Gapper, “Counterculture to Cyberculture: The Spirit of the 1960s Has Resurfaced in the Form of Web 2.0, Social Networking and User-Generated Content Websites, Writes John Gapper,” *The Financial Times*, Wednesday November 15, 2006.

termed this tendency “the Californian ideology,” a pairing of hippie libertarianism and collectivism with the entrepreneurialism of Silicon Valley tech companies. Barbrook and Cameron comment how the Californian Ideology adopted the libertarian will for freedoms of the New Left after the 1960s. However, they observe that: “In place of the collective freedom sought by the hippie radicals, they have championed the liberty of individuals within the marketplace.”<sup>501</sup> Despite the new economic opportunities for Silicon Valley tech firms that digital networks afforded, these same possibilities for the free distribution of information became a point of contention for copyright holders. This is particularly true for the major record labels and entertainment industry, for which Internet distribution offered an immediate threat to their existing means of profiting from content distribution.<sup>502</sup> Thus the discourse surrounding the Internet and its challenge to notions of copyright echoes that of the cassette and home taping from decades earlier.

One of the most prominent examples of the anti-copyright ethos is the “open source” movement, in which software developers share their codes for free online in order for other developers to work on and improve, then redistribute. This model makes use of the massive resources of collective labour that the Internet affords, in order to benefit users with free software.<sup>503</sup> In Hill’s case however, the content that the artist appropriates often does not fall under a commons or “open” license. As Hill notes, his anti-copyright practice is a form of “direct action” in an “ignoring of private property.”<sup>504</sup> For Hill, this is a gesture with the purpose of challenging conventions of ownership and the commodification of content. However, as evident throughout my case studies, for experimental and independent musicians often a conscious disavowal of music’s commercial exchange value imbues it with a kind of authenticity, even subcultural capital. Thus the value for Hill in his music practice is bound to music’s

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<sup>501</sup> Richard Barbrook and Andy Cameron, “The Californian Ideology,” *Science as Culture* 6, no. 1 (1996): 50.

<sup>502</sup> Drew, 267.

<sup>503</sup> Terranova, 92.

<sup>504</sup> Hill, interview by Davis.

use-value as a site of authentic experience and community building, treating exchange-value with suspicion.

Another long running collaborative project of Hill's to make use of a model of open sharing for community building is the image blog Jah Jah Sphinx. Jah Jah Sphinx was founded by Hill and a number of his peers including James Deutscher, Joshua Petherick, Olivia Barrett, Nicholas Mangan, Helen Johnson and Matthew Brown in 2006.<sup>505</sup> Contributors to the blog post images often sourced on the Internet. These images are removed from their original context and form a dialogue with one another according to their formal, aesthetic characteristic or cultural associations. The site's name is in itself an act of appropriation, playing on the name of Star Wars character Jar Jar Binx. Jah Jah Sphinx is hosted on the Blogger platform, and was an early example of image blogging, a trend that became popular in the late 2000s in which users posted assorted images of interest, having the effect of a sort of digital collage.<sup>506</sup> Jah Jah Sphinx also predated the immense popularity of image blogs that would appear on the micro blogging platform Tumblr, which was founded in 2007.<sup>507</sup> Tumblr became known in the initial years after its foundation for its users' tendency to post images and GIFs related to retro 1990s nostalgia, as well as playing host to numerous online musical and youth subcultures.<sup>508</sup>

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<sup>505</sup> Ibid.

<sup>506</sup> Other later examples of image blogs included JJJJound, a blog founded in 2008 by Montreal designer Justin R. Saunders and contemporary art image blog VVORK. Dan Gould, "Archives of Dope: An Interview with Justin Saunders of JJJJound," *PSFK*, January 28, 2009, accessed February 1, 2017, <http://www.psfk.com/2009/01/archives-of-dope-an-interview-with-justin-saunders-of-jjjjound.html>.

Michael Connor, "After VVORK: How (and Why) We Archived a Contemporary Art Blog," *Rhizome*, February 9, 2015, accessed February 1, 2017, <http://rhizome.org/editorial/2015/feb/9/archiving-vvork>.

<sup>507</sup> Elspeth Reeve, "The Secret Lives of Tumblr Teens," *New Republic*, February 17, 2016, accessed February 1, 2017, <https://newrepublic.com/article/129002/secret-lives-tumblr-teens>.

<sup>508</sup> Lucy Stehlik, "Seapunk: Scenester in-Joke or Underground Art Movement?," *The Guardian*, Saturday December 15, 2012, accessed January 30, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2012/dec/14/seapunk-has-now-gone-pop>.



Figure 21. *Jah Jah Sphinx* blog screen grab, 2017.

### Music blogs, their influence on Hill and DIY music practice

Hill has commented that an early influence for his use of the Blogger platform was the prominent music blogs that proliferated in the mid-2000s. These blogs, such as *Mutant Sounds*, shared MP3 content for free, often without copyright permission and hence illegally, and became a resource for music fans seeking rare or out-of-print releases.<sup>509</sup> Music blogs also acted as a tool for emerging independent musicians, with certain blogs such as *20 Jazz Funk Greats*, *Gorilla Vs Bear* and *Rose Quartz* becoming popular sites for reviewing new music.<sup>510</sup> The blogs served as a space in which the overwhelming amount of new music content online was consolidated for listeners with similar tastes. Music blogs tended to decline in popularity in the first few years of the 2010s. In a 2015 interview, Henning Lahmann, co-founder of the music news site *No Fear of Pop* which itself evolved from a blog, discusses this decline. Lahmann notes

<sup>509</sup> The Wire, "Mutant Sounds Dies, is Resurrected in the Flames of the Free Music Archive," News, *The Wire*, March 20, 2013, accessed January 5, 2018, [https://www.thewire.co.uk/news/23081/mutant-sounds\\_dies-and-is-resurrected-in-the-flames-of-the-fma](https://www.thewire.co.uk/news/23081/mutant-sounds_dies-and-is-resurrected-in-the-flames-of-the-fma).

<sup>510</sup> Pitchfork, "Pitchfork Unites Blog Collective for New Music Site Altered Zones," *Pitchfork*, June 29, 2010, accessed February 1, 2017, <http://pitchfork.com/news/39305-pitchfork-unites-blog-collective-for-new-music-site-altered-zones/>.

that a change towards streaming as well as the way in which music fans engaged with social media was behind this shift:

I think the constant access to high-quality music makes people less adventurous. They don't need to sift through webpages and embeds anymore, and there's so much just *there* in front of you. I think all of these streaming sites played a big role in the shift away from blogs; people subscribe to a bunch of musicians who post a feed of new material.<sup>511</sup>

It can be presumed that in "these streaming sites" Lahmann is referring to newly emerging websites such as SoundCloud and Bandcamp. He also refers to streaming via social media platforms Facebook (founded 2004) and Twitter (founded 2006).

Lahmann suggests these platforms have become sites in which communities can develop around shared tastes, eschewing the need for blogs to aggregate likeminded new music. Adding to the decline of free music being shared by blogs was the high profile closure by the FBI of file hosting service Megaupload in 2012, and takedowns on MediaFire, which were the hosts of much of the shared content on music blogs.<sup>512</sup>

As with the cassette culture, these platforms allowed a growing international network for Australian independent and experimental musicians, offering a global audience through an accessible free service. Most recently, and even more popularly, streaming services such as Spotify and Apple Music emerged in 2008 and 2015 respectively. These platforms offer massive libraries of music from major entertainment companies such as Sony Music Entertainment and Universal Music Group, as well as independent record labels including from small Melbourne and Australian scenes. Music streaming on these platforms is offered to users in exchange for either a monthly subscription

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<sup>511</sup> Daniel Jones, "Music Site No Fear of Pop Says Blog's Not Dead," *Electronic Beats*, May 20, 2015, accessed December 24, 2017, <http://www.electronicbeats.net/music-site-no-fear-of-pop-says-blogs-not-dead/>.

<sup>512</sup> Sean Ludwig, "MediaFire CEO: Unlike Megaupload, Our Business Model Isn't Built on Piracy," *Venture Beat*, January 22, 2012, accessed January 11, 2018, <http://venturebeat.com/2012/01/22/mediafire-megaupload-business-model-piracy/>.

fee, or in the case of Spotify, free with the inclusion of advertising content.<sup>513</sup> With streaming there is a convergence in the way in which music is distributed over platforms. DIY musicians, independent record labels, and major labels now all coexist in a shared digital media space for the distribution of their content. This is markedly different to the situation of independent musicians discussed by both David Chesworth and Bruce Milne in Chapters Two and Three. Recall both Chesworth and Milne independently commenting on the existence of “two different worlds” in the 1980s. These were the worlds of either independent music or the mainstream music found on broadcast media such as the popular music television show *Countdown*, hosted by Molly Meldrum on ABC.

Hill appears conscious of the sometimes-fleeting nature of Internet platforms as a means for the distribution of music content, commenting that “being the generation I’m of I’ve seen technologies come and go.”<sup>514</sup> For this reason, he notes his preference through consolidation in a platform such as a blog. However, Hill comments that “I like to be across platforms and not pinned down to an identity within a platform.”<sup>515</sup> This statement speaks to the way in which Internet platforms allow for users to make and remake identities, performing with different elements of style across different platforms. A user can hone a certain tone of posting on particular platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, or a particular style and aesthetic for platforms such as Instagram and Tumblr. Instagram for instance, a mobile image or video sharing application and social media service founded in 2010, has famously become a platform for lifestyle-related posts and “selfies.”<sup>516</sup>

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<sup>513</sup> Scott Porch, “FADER Explains: Apple Music,” *The Fader*, June 9, 2015, accessed January 11, 2018, <http://www.thefader.com/2015/06/09/what-is-apple-music>.

<sup>514</sup> Hill, interview by Davis.

<sup>515</sup> Ibid.

<sup>516</sup> Hans Ulrich Obrist, “Hans Ulrich Obrist Speaks with Instagram Co-Inventor Mike Krieger,” *032c*, Summer 2015, 230-233.

However, since user-generated content has become a sophisticated mode for consumption from the mid-2000s, platforms have found ways to guide the way in which users make use of the services. As Hill notes:

[The way users view platforms such as] Tumblr, Twitter and SoundCloud [...] which is different from blogs, [...] is good and bad I think, because it means that everyone has a standardised format of how they look at it<sup>517</sup>

The difference here that Hill mentions, is that the coding of the webpages on these platforms is such that a standardised mode of viewing through a “stream” prevents users from having control of the interface or experience of the site. This is certainly a conscious effort on the part of the platform to at once satisfy users’ desires to share their individual and subjective content as well as to be creative, but also to do so in a way in which the platform maintains some control over the user’s behaviours. With the rise of social media and so called “prosumption” in the mid-2000s, Internet-based companies have managed to develop in users a familiarity and reliance on their platforms for the distribution of their creative projects and communications. For this reason, Hill’s statement above speaks to his preference for the customisation that Google’s Blogger platform allows. Blogger is an older platform, and it remains possible for its users to define the layout, as well as the presence of advertising, on their blogs.

### **Copyright and theft: Hill’s work in relation to digital culture, appropriation and copyright**

Hill proposes that a common thread “historically that has continued through different streams of anarchism is the freedom of property and the distribution of copy” and “[this notion of open sharing and freeness] run through a lot of artists who I’ve been

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<sup>517</sup> Hill, interview by Davis.

interested in.”<sup>518</sup> This statement can be interpreted as an affinity shared by Hill with the notions of a DIY “gift economy,” along the lines of that described by Barbrook earlier. In a similar vein, the tradition of sampling and DJ culture as it pertains most notably and specifically to hip hop culture is a creative influence on Hill’s use of appropriated content.<sup>519</sup> The re-appropriated images of Jah Jah Sphinx is in a general sense akin to the way in which samples in electronic and hip hop music cultures are re-used in order to take on new stylistic significations. For example, certain funk “drum breaks” have been sampled and used countless times in hip hop tracks. A short drumbeat from The Honey Dripper’s *Impeach the President* (1973) for instance, has become synonymous with hip hop music, and is known as one of the most sampled tracks in history.<sup>520</sup>

It is worth noting here that a crucial piece of technology for sample-based music, the Fairlight CMI or “computer music instrument,” a sampler and synthesizer released in 1979, was an Australian invention. The Fairlight CMI was the first digital sampler, allowing recorded sounds to be played back at various pitches and lengths using its accompanying keyboard. This instrument was very expensive upon release, costing upwards of AUD 100,000 to purchase, however was adopted early on by renowned pop producers and musicians such as Peter Gabriel and Thomas Dolby. The Fairlight can be heard in pop music records including Michael Jackson’s 1982 track “Beat It” and Kate Bush’s 1980 single “Babooshka.”<sup>521</sup>

The use of sampling images and sounds in artworks for political means has a long lineage. For instance, the *détournements* of the Situationists appropriated imagery originally found in advertising with the intention of subverting their meanings and

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<sup>518</sup> Ibid.

<sup>519</sup> Ibid.

<sup>520</sup> Rich Stim, “Safe Sampling: How to Secure the Permissions You Need,” *Keyboard* 25, no. 4 (April 1999): 70.

<sup>521</sup> Doug Eisengrein, “Samplers Today,” *Remix* 6, no. 11 (November 2004): 58.

Simon Leo Brown, “Fairlight CMI Synthesiser, Used by Stars Like Michael Jackson, Added to Sounds of Australia Registry,” *ABC News*, Wednesday November 18, 2015, accessed December 23, 2017, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-11-18/fairlight-cmi-synthesiser-included-in-sounds-of-australia/6950392>.



significations. As McKenzie Wark comments: “Détournement is precisely the tactic of treating all information as the commons, and refusing all private property in this domain.”<sup>522</sup> In other words, the practice of détournement was concerned with a similar challenge to the commodification of intellectual property, and private property in general, to that of the Internet. Earlier still was the work of artists making use of photomontage, such as Dada artists of the 1910s and John Heartfield’s politically charged photomontages critiquing Nazi Germany in the 1930s.<sup>523</sup> Artists working in the field of postmodern appropriation during the 1980s too share this lineage. Founded in 1980, San Francisco music performance and recording group Negativland also helped further popularise the use of found sound and images for the purpose of anti-consumerist activism. In their words the group uses content “taken from corporately owned mass culture and the world around them, Negativland re-arranges these found bits and pieces to make them say and suggest things that they never intended to.”<sup>524</sup> Negativland coined the term “culture jamming” in 1984 to describe the practices of reworking found images of advertising in order to subvert their meaning, not unlike the practices of the Situationists. The group has been sued twice for copyright infringement, and has been an activist voice for the reform of copyright law.<sup>525</sup>

The lineage discussed above outlines ways musicians and artists have used media to divorce the anchoring of images and music from commodity exchange. This echoes the value system espoused by Hill, one that is bound to community building and authenticity rather than exchange-value. Such discussions were evident in DIY music scenes prior to the Internet, as was the case with indie and the cassette culture, however the Internet’s arrival marked an important development. It is not only the notion of copyright that has been challenged by the Internet, but the very way in which

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<sup>522</sup> McKenzie Wark, “Communicative Capitalism,” *Public Seminar*, entry posted March 23, 2015, accessed January 20, 2017, <http://www.publicseminar.org/2015/03/communicative-capitalism/#.WI6WaRA1b-Y>.

<sup>523</sup> Peter Chametzky, “Sabine T. Kriebel. Revolutionary Beauty: The Radical Photomontages of John Heartfield,” *The American Historical Review* 120, no. 2 (2015): 736-737.

<sup>524</sup> Negativland, “The Negativland Story: Negativworldwidewebland,” accessed February 1, 2017, [http://www.negativland.com/news/?page\\_id=277](http://www.negativland.com/news/?page_id=277).

<sup>525</sup> Ibid.

music is bound to market exchange more generally. The distribution potentials of the Internet that saw the free peer-to-peer sharing of MP3 files proved a significant challenge to the major record labels model of commoditising music through the selling of records, cassettes and CDs.<sup>526</sup> The massive success of the MP3 by the late-1990s was preemptive of how the consumption of cultural content more generally has come to be rethought in the early 21st century. In the 2010s, consumers increasingly expect content to be readily available digitally, such as through streaming platforms. The free online distribution of content has rewritten the way in which we consume many forms of media in the digital present. However it was the success of the MP3 medium for distributing music that offered the first major debate and entertainment industry backlash to the Internet's content sharing developments.<sup>527</sup> Hill uses Internet platforms prolifically, both with MP3s for the distribution of his music, as well as social media platforms and blogs for sharing documentation and online projects. The *Satin Mask* blog for instance is a site on which Hill and Petherick post past releases by their label Bunyip Trax alongside others for free, along with scans of each release's cover art.<sup>528</sup> This site follows the format of the aforementioned music blogs that developed prolifically over the early 2000s. In essence, it is a continuation of the free distribution of bootlegging and cassette copies that circulated in the music underground during the 1980s, at the height of the cassette culture.

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<sup>526</sup> Kembrew McLeod, "MP3s Are Killing Home Taping," 521-531.

<sup>527</sup> Sterne, *MP3: The Meaning of a Format*, 27.

<sup>528</sup> Christopher LG Hill and Joshua Petherick, "Satin Mask," Blogger, accessed January 5, 2018, <http://saturnmasque.blogspot.com.au/>.

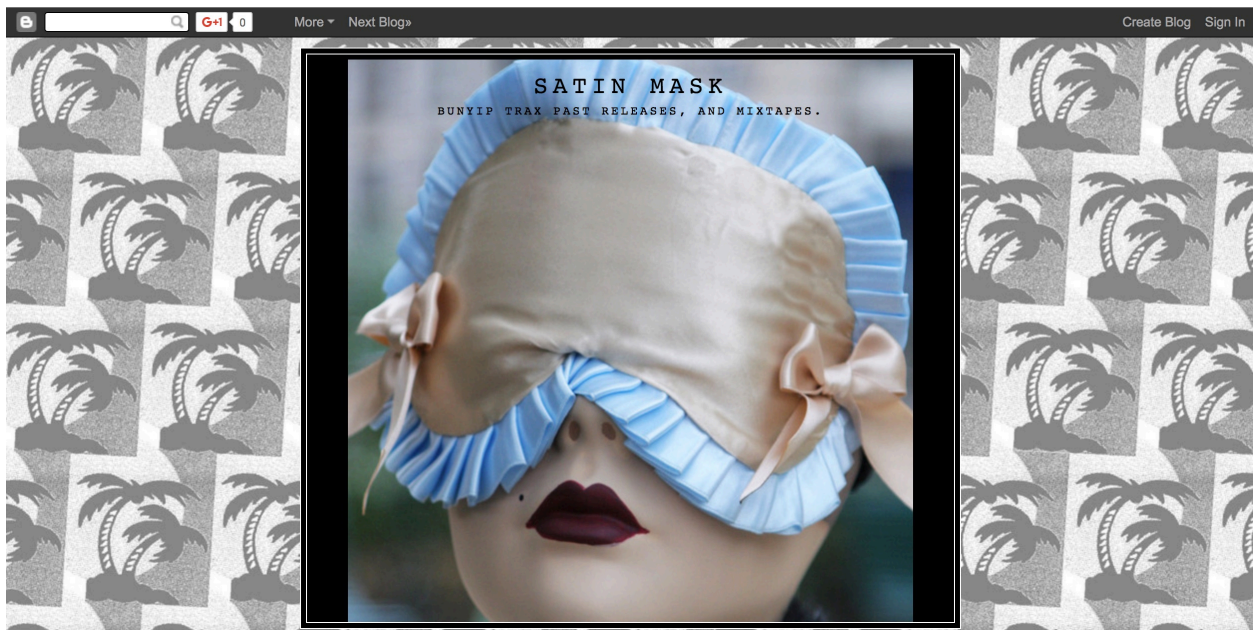


Figure 22. *Satin Mask* blog screen grab, 2017.

### **Rising rents and Melbourne’s increasingly digital artist-run initiative landscape: how Hill’s practice challenges the notion of the local**

Hill’s practice has outcomes both in physical sites as well as online spaces. In order to provide a context for the increasing uptake of Internet platforms by musicians and artists in Melbourne such as Hill, I would like first to provide an outline of Melbourne gallery spaces and venues during the 2000s, particularly those mentioned above that have been accessed by Hill and his peers. In doing so I analyse the changing landscape for DIY experimental musicians and artists in Melbourne in the digital age.

Fitzroy, former home of the aforementioned Gertrude Contemporary gallery, has been discussed in previous chapters as a formerly working class suburb that became a hub of live music throughout the 1980s and 1990s. It is also a suburb with a rich history of visual arts. Since the mid-1990s, Fitzroy has been subject to a rapid process of gentrification and sharply rising property values. Ironically, while the suburb’s nature as a cultural hub has been used as a selling point for the property market, this climate of gentrification has squeezed music and arts venues out of the suburb. A similar situation is true of other inner northern suburbs mentioned in my thesis, Brunswick

and Northcote.<sup>529</sup> Gertrude Contemporary opened in 1985 at 200 Gertrude Street. At the time, the address was also the founding name of the organisation. Philip Cormie, Managing Director of art supply company Vitrex-Camden, developed the concept for the organisation to be housed at the site, then his company's rented warehouse.<sup>530</sup> After receiving State and Federal funding grants 200 Gertrude Street opened to the public on 19 August 1985.<sup>531</sup> In the decades since, the space has developed into a key organisation in the Australian contemporary arts community, supported by public funding and private philanthropy.<sup>532</sup>

TCB Art Inc. is another notable artist-run initiative, one that has played host to a number of projects involving Hill most significantly his 2008 *Y2K* biennial. Artists Thomas Deverall, Sharon Goodwin and Blair Trethowan founded the initiative in inner city Melbourne's Port Phillip Arcade in 1998. In 2001 the initiative moved to a site on Waratah Place off Melbourne's Chinatown, where it remains today. The new site was shared with a newly established commercial art gallery Uplands, run by TCB Art Inc. co-founder Trethowan and curator Jarrod Rawlins. Uplands was established to provide commercial opportunities to the younger generation of Melbourne artists not serviced by the existing commercial gallery environment in Melbourne. Its relationship with TCB Art Inc., by way of its situation and co-founder, demonstrated its willingness to promote more experimental and less typically commercial artworks. In 2006, Uplands

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<sup>529</sup> Kate Shaw, "High Rents Aren't Hip: The Contradictions of the 'Creative City'," *The Conversation*, February 10, 2014, accessed January 12, 2018, <https://theconversation.com/high-rents-arent-hip-the-contradictions-of-the-creative-city-21749>.

<sup>530</sup> Cormie had in 1983 visited the PS1 contemporary arts complex in New York City and was inspired by its mix of studios, performance and exhibition spaces, hoping to develop an equivalent site in Melbourne. Cormie contacted Jill Graham, then the Visual Arts Executive at the Ministry for the Arts in Victoria. Subsequently, after coming into contact with the Dean of the School of Art at the Victorian College of the Arts, John Walker, a group of VCA staff and students banded together to develop the organisation. The initial founders of 200 Gertrude Street consisted of, along with Cormie, Graham and Walker, the artists Tim Bass and Jan Murray. Carolyn Barnes, "An Historical Perspective," in *200 Gertrude Street: Perspectives*, eds. Charlotte Day, Rose Lang, and Fiona Whitworth (Fitzroy, VIC: 200 Gertrude Street incorporating Gertrude Street Artists' Spaces, 1995), 10.

<sup>531</sup> Ibid.

<sup>532</sup> Gertrude Contemporary.

left the Waratah Place site to relocate to the inner south-eastern suburb of Prahran, leaving TCB Art Inc. with a larger exhibition space.<sup>533</sup>

TCB Art Inc. is one of a number of inner city Melbourne artist-run initiatives, founded during periods of much cheaper inner city rents during the 1990s and early 2000s. Others include Bus, founded in 2001 by a group of artists and designers at a studio space on Little Lonsdale Street in Melbourne's city centre. Bus has since relocated to Collingwood in 2013 after changing its name to Bus Projects in 2008.<sup>534</sup> Initially taking an ad hoc and informal approach to their organisational activities, the artist-run initiative from their early inception had an emphasis and place for sound and experimental music. The gallery's original Little Lonsdale Street site had a designated sound space for sound art installation. Furthermore, the organisation published a series of CDs in the mid-2000s titled *Outer*, compiled by board member Patrick O'Brien and featuring local experimental musicians. O'Brien also opened a record and bookstore within the original Bus site in 2008.<sup>535</sup>

Another artist-run initiative that Hill had direct involvement with was CLUBSproject. Initially, CLUBSproject operated from 2002 at a space above the Builders Arms Hotel pub on Gertrude Street, Fitzroy. From 2006, after difficulties in negotiating use of the space with the pub's new landlords, CLUBSproject went on to become a nomadic initiative, developing art projects for various sites until 2007. These included gallery spaces such as Gertrude Contemporary, Bus and the artist-run initiative Ocular Lab, as

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<sup>533</sup> TCB Art Inc., "ABOUT," [tcbartinc.org.au](https://tcbartinc.org.au), accessed December 23, 2017, <https://tcbartinc.org.au/about>.

Jon Campbell, Meg Hale, and Kati Rule, "TCB," in *Making Space: Artist-Run Initiatives in Victoria*, ed. Din Heagney (Victoria, Australia: VIA-N — the Victorian Initiatives of Artists Network, 2007), 101-102.

Ashley Crawford, "Old Galleries Not the Only Place to Be Seen," *Entertainment, The Age*, Saturday April 24, 2004, accessed December 23, 2017, <http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2004/04/21/1082530226664.html>.

<sup>534</sup> Bus Projects, "About," Bus Projects, accessed December 23, 2017, <https://busprojects.org.au/about>.

<sup>535</sup> Ibid.

Zara Stanhope, "Unfiled Notes on Victorian Artist-Run Initiatives," in *Making Space: Artist-Run Initiatives in Victoria*, ed. Din Heagney (Victoria, Australia: VIA-N — the Victorian Initiatives of Artists Network, 2007), 6.

Kade McDonald, Claire Mooney, Patrick O'Brien, and Tim O'Donoghue, "BUS," in *Making Space: Artist-Run Initiatives in Victoria*, ed. Din Heagney (Victoria, Australia: VIA-N — the Victorian Initiatives of Artists Network, 2007), 78.

well as unconventional sites for art projects including Brunswick's Velodrome.<sup>536</sup> Hill was a later member of CLUBSproject, and developed an exhibition for the initiative at the Wellington, New Zealand gallery Enjoy in 2006. The exhibition predominantly featured works by Hill and Deutscher, along with other contributions by Melbourne artists within Hill's network, namely Sean Bailey, Helen Johnson, Nick Mangan, Joshua Petherick, Kain Picken, Masato Takasaka and Annie Wu. In a description of the exhibition on Enjoy's website, the exhibition was outlined as "blurring the role of author, curator, holiday, space, object, gallery and anonymity, themes of ownership and hosting were explored."<sup>537</sup> This sweeping statement speaks to Hill's interest in "openness" throughout his practice, as well as a will to challenge notions of property or ownership. Collaborative authorship, another aspect of Hill's practice, is also an apparent theme. In fact, a number of these concerns are reflected generally in the CLUBSproject initiative itself. In a mind-map diagram developed by the initiative in 2007 to document its history, certain key themes are identified such as "collaborations," "hosting," "communities" as well as tendencies towards "reconfiguring organisational relations" and maintaining "flexible" programming.<sup>538</sup> The commitment to collaborative working practices and "openness" as a general ethos that permeates the language of CLUBSproject have no doubt been practices that have maintained Hill's interest during and after his work with the initiative.

Rising rents in Melbourne have been a persistent issue in squeezing artist-run initiatives in Melbourne and their longevity.<sup>539</sup> Some organisations have expanded from their initial volunteer and artist-run models to become further professionalised and staffed organisations relying on public funding. These include Bus Projects and West Space, founded in 1993 in the working class inner western suburb of Footscray,

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<sup>536</sup> CLUBSproject, "CLUBSproject," in *Making Space: Artist-Run Initiatives in Victoria*, ed. Din Heagney (Victoria, Australia: VIA-N — the Victorian Initiatives of Artists Network, 2007), 84-85.

Enjoy Gallery, "CLUBSproject Inc. & Christopher L.G. Hill Present:," Enjoy Gallery, accessed January 25, 2018, <http://enjoy.org.nz/clubsproject-inc-and-christopher-l-g-hill>.

<sup>537</sup> Enjoy Gallery.

<sup>538</sup> CLUBSproject, 84-85.

<sup>539</sup> Stanhope, 4.

now located in the inner city.<sup>540</sup> As with the example of CLUBSproject, other contemporary artist-run initiatives have made use of less typical exhibition spaces or taken a nomadic approach to account for the increasing difficulty of hosting exhibitions in physical sites. For example, one-day exhibitions have been held in Melbourne in domestic spaces with increasing frequency. One such recent example was *Kia Ora*, an exhibition curated by artist Adam John Cullen in 2015 at the artist's home. The exhibition's title is a Māori greeting phrase as well as the name of the house in which the exhibition was held.<sup>541</sup> Also in 2015, experimental fashion and art initiative Centre for Style—run by curator Matthew Linde—hosted an exhibition at a makeshift gallery space built in the backyard of a Fitzroy share house, titled *Cabin Fever Creature*.<sup>542</sup>

Further alternatives to permanent gallery spaces include a brief exhibition titled *Tell Me What You Have and I Will Know What You Are*, organised in August 2016 by writer and curator Audrey Schmidt, and held at an apartment rented from the flat sharing service Airbnb.<sup>543</sup> Developed in partnership with independent art magazine *Dissect*, the exhibition featured contributions from local and international artists. These included a performance that took place remotely in New York by US performance artist Karen Finley, and was live-streamed online as well as in the Airbnb apartment space. For the work, titled “Sext Me If You Can,” Finley painted personalised images for participants based on “sexts,” or sexually oriented images, that they had been invited to send to the artist.<sup>544</sup>

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<sup>540</sup> West Space, “About,” West Space, accessed January 5, 2018, <https://westspace.org.au/about>.

<sup>541</sup> Eleanor Ivory Weber, “Postcard from Melbourne,” *Frieze*, Internet Archive Wayback Machine, entry posted October 2, 2015, accessed December 23, 2017, <https://web.archive.org/web/20151010100610/http://blog.frieze.com/postcard-from-melbourne/>.

<sup>542</sup> Centre for Style, “Cabin Fever Creature,” Centre for Style, accessed December 23, 2017, <http://www.centreforstyle.org/cabin-fever-creature.html>.

<sup>543</sup> Dissect Journal, “Exhibition,” *Dissect*, accessed December 23, 2017, <http://dissectjournal.com/exhibition>.

<sup>544</sup> Dissect Journal, “Karen Finley – Sext Me If You Can,” *Dissect*, accessed December 23, 2017, <http://dissectjournal.com/exhibition/karen-finley-sext-me-if-you-can>.

With each of these examples, being fleeting in nature, online components to the exhibitions including documentation and video play an important role in accessing the shows. While exhibitions in private domestic spaces in Melbourne are highly local, the examples above have reached international audiences and featured contributions from international artists as a result of the exhibitions' online components. Most pertinent to my research is the way in which online spaces have been adopted by artists in Melbourne, in particular Hill, for the exhibition of work and the distribution of DIY and experimental music. The way in which artists have adopted online spaces has had specific effects on the nature of the local in Melbourne's increasingly globalised experimental music and arts communities.

A shift towards online arts practices has effected not only the distribution of music and visual art, but also challenged the discipline specificity of such practices. Hill's practice is interdisciplinary, and the relationships between his music, visual, and writing practices share similar aesthetic and conceptual interests. This is particularly significant given the online nature of much of his work. Digital platforms allow for, or in fact encourage, a diverse creative output consisting of different media. Just as Maurizio Lazzarato has commented that contemporary consumers in the digital present are expected to "become subjects,"<sup>545</sup> they too are expected to express this subjectivity across a variety of means: images (Instagram), audio (SoundCloud), text (Twitter) and moving image (YouTube). In my thesis I have traced how Melbourne DIY musicians have found means through media and technology for self-expression outside of the bounds dictated by the major entertainment industry. The way in which DIY musicians used cassette tapes foreshadowed the significance of the platform in the digital age. Cassette culture participants, such as *Fast Forward* in Melbourne, also contributed to a new globalisation of underground music scenes. By the 2010s, social media platforms expect users globally to engage in a kind of DIY practice. Their business model emphasises providing access to the platform, rather than dictating its content.

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<sup>545</sup> Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labor," 135.



For Hill, online platforms play a crucial role for the presentation of music—one that I would argue is more important than physical spaces. There is a narrative at play here in the changing nature of DIY music distribution. Unlike the Clifton Hill Community Music Centre, which focused on physical events and a highly localised, small community, the online spaces that Hill operates within explode the notion of the local into the globalised space of the Internet. The increased reliance on online spaces by experimental and DIY musicians can be linked to a number of factors and shifts that I have discussed throughout this thesis. Among them, the increasing lack of affordability of rent for unconventional performance spaces. Where the Clifton Hill Community Music Centre was held in a “community centre” for very little rent, the trend in ensuing decades has been one of decreased physical sites for experimental arts due to a dwindling availability of affordable spaces. As discussed by Melbourne rave organisers earlier, in the 1990s Australia’s financial recession led to affordable rates for temporary rental due to an abundance of vacant leases. This had changed by the end of the 1990s with a boom in the Melbourne property market.<sup>546</sup>

With this said, Melbourne in particular has benefited from a political climate that has valued maintaining the health of live music venues. Facing challenges from rising costs, liquor licensing laws and increasing residential developments, advocacy grew in Melbourne during the 2010s for the survival of dedicated live music venues. In 2010 iconic rock music pub The Tote Hotel in Collingwood, at the time run by former *Fast Forward* cassette magazine co-editor Bruce Milne, faced the prospect of closure due to growing costs associated with liquor licensing laws. Subsequently, a protest movement led to the birth of the advocacy not-for-profit Save Live Australian Music (SLAM), along with Music Victoria, the state’s peak body for live music.<sup>547</sup>

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<sup>546</sup> Philip Soos, “A Sore Lesson from Housing History,” Business Review, *The Australian*, Tuesday June 11, 2013, accessed January 5, 2018, <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/business/business-spectator/a-sore-lesson-from-housing-history/news-story/23f9caef3a4bca26538f189870c3376e>.

<sup>547</sup> Harden.

Save Live Australia’s Music, “Slam Day 2013 | About,” Save Live Australia’s Music, accessed December 25, 2017, <http://slamrally.org/about-us>.

Music Victoria, “About Music Victoria,” Music Victoria, accessed December 25, 2017, <http://www.musicvictoria.com.au/about>.

The availability of physical space is not the only factor affecting the delocalisation of DIY music communities. Global digital media and its uptake by musicians causes a widening of the net of practices. On social web platforms that practitioners such as Hill use to distribute their work, artist networks are globalised. What's more, musicians and artists across Australia are increasingly mobile due to significant decreases in the costs of international and domestic air travel. A return flight from Australia to the UK in 2016 would typically cost AUD 1700. A similar fare would nominally cost AUD 1850 in 1981, however taking inflation into account this would be equivalent to AUD 9363 in 2016.<sup>548</sup> Air travel has become significantly more affordable, and this has created increased opportunities for direct engagement in global DIY music and arts communities by Melbourne practitioners that can then continue online.

On digital platforms, experimental musicians such as Hill share a media space with other more mainstream practitioners. This is a far cry from the “us and them” dichotomy of mainstream musicians and underground musicians that I discussed in the initial chapters of my thesis. At the beginning of the 1980s, DIY musicians in Melbourne turned to cheap and affordable media such as the cassette in order to provide publication and distribution for themselves. In doing so they avoided needing the attention of major record labels with the financial support for mass distribution, or mainstream broadcast media. In the 2010s however, a musician such as Hill making use of platforms such as YouTube and SoundCloud shares the use of these platforms with mainstream artists and the major recording industry. To some extent, the field of music distribution has been flattened in this sense with digital media, to incorporate DIY bedroom artists and mainstream artists in one field. That is not to say that a conventional hierarchy between independent and mainstream artists in terms of reach has disappeared. For instance, despite YouTube's brand message for foregrounding

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<sup>548</sup> Elizabeth Knight, “International Air Fares at 30-Year Low,” Business, *The Age*, Friday April 22, 2016, accessed January 8, 2018, <http://www.smh.com.au/business/aviation/international-air-fares-at-30year-low-20160422-gocr1r.html>.

user-generated content, a vast majority of YouTube viewers use the platform simply to watch and listen. Furthermore the most accessed content on YouTube is not music by independent users, or even home videos for that matter, but music videos released by major record labels.<sup>549</sup> Nonetheless, in independent and DIY music communities the discourse surrounding indie authenticity being valued over commercial interests continues within this shared digital media space. Hill's preference for instance in sharing his content for free ascribes a certain value, or subcultural capital, to an anti-commercial approach.

Throughout my thesis I have discussed the continued impetus for DIY musicians of anti-conformist self-expression, as well as the way in which this exists side by side with notions of community. For example, the practitioners associated with *Fast Forward* cassette magazine favoured an anti-conformist approach and foregrounding of self-expression in their DIY call to arms. At the same time, these same practitioners saw community building and networking both locally within Australia and internationally through their mail network as key to their project. With Hill, the tension between the individual expression of the artist and community building is apparent. Hill's practice often draws from multiple authors within the artists' community, such as with projects including Hill's exhibit as part of *Melbourne Now* at the National Gallery of Victoria in 2013.

The use of social media platforms shares a similar contradictory logic. On the one hand social media platforms are grounded on self-expression in accordance with the neoliberal emphasis on individualism and entrepreneurialism. This logic is coupled with a shifting towards the private sphere as a site of consumption, an approach that in some ways is compatible with the DIY ethos of independent music. At the same time, social media leverages users' will for community building and a sense of belonging. This can have quite divisive effects. Much discussion has ensued in the wake of

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<sup>549</sup> Telegraph Reports, "Top 10 Most Watched YouTube Video of All Time," Technology, *The Telegraph*, Friday August 4, 2017, accessed January 5, 2018, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/0/most-watched-youtube-videos-of-all-time/>.

2016's US election of Donald Trump on the tendency for social media platforms to create "echo chambers" among users, of communities expressing and amplifying similar opinions without the checks and balances of counterarguments. Facebook's CEO Mark Zuckerberg weighed in on this discussion in February 2017 with an open letter addressing his company's commitment to curb the spread of misinformation or "fake news" among such "echo chambers." Zuckerberg's letter expresses a firm affinity in its rhetoric to notions of a "global community" and Facebook's role in regulating "collective values" and the "social fabric" of its users. These are comments that media theorist Tiziana Terranova suggested reveal platform-oriented tech companies such as Facebook's "vocation to become a new form of social government."<sup>550</sup> Digital media has thus complicated the way in which value is found in building a sense of community, long an impetus for DIY music cultures.

### **DIY music practice in the age of digital labour**

Throughout this thesis I have tracked a shift from an emphasis on the commodification of content to the commodification of the platform. This has been played out in the music industry with the shifting emphasis from mass-produced record commodities to online music distribution. In the latter, music production's value becomes in part the use-value of communication and developing a sense of community. Hill's specific use of Vine and Blogger is exemplary of this contemporary nature of DIY creative practice, and its emphasis on collaboration, community and sharing. In a recent interview, Hill noted that his practice of disseminating music and visual work via platforms such as Blogger follows on from the DIY practice of making fanzines.<sup>551</sup> This is an observation that supports my argument made in the previous chapter on blogging as a contemporary equivalent of fanzine culture. What is different in recent years is that the logic of what was once "DIY" media has now been adopted as a

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<sup>550</sup> Tiziana Terranova, "Platform Capitalism and the Government of the Social. Facebook's 'Global Community'," *Technocultures Research Unit* blog, entry posted February 21, 2017, accessed December 23, 2017, <http://www.technoculture.it/en/2017/02/21/platform-capitalism-and-the-government-of-the-social/>.

<sup>551</sup> Hill, interview by Davis.

mainstream form of consumption in contemporary “prosumption.” DIY creative practices in the present are not simply engaged with by underground arts practitioners such as Hill, for whom the use of digital platforms is an extension of previous practices such as cassette tapes and fanzines.

Forty years after punk called on music listeners to ditch the major record labels and “do-it-yourself,” a new platform-oriented entertainment industry actively encourages the unpaid creative work of users, offering the reward of becoming a visual artist (Instagram), a filmmaker (YouTube or rival Vimeo, founded 2004), an actor (Vine) or a musician (SoundCloud), with the lines between these practices increasingly blurred.<sup>552</sup> The blurring of leisure and labour and the shift from consumption to production that is a characteristic of the global digital economy was in an early instance embodied in do-it-yourself music initiatives. This complicates the way in which contemporary DIY musicians such as Hill and his peers have navigated the use of Internet platforms such as Myspace, Blogger and SoundCloud. In the neoliberal culture of consumption and its ethos of self-expression, the practice of being a DIY musician can be seen as an exemplary expression of digital culture’s logic.

Previously I have discussed cultural production that could be termed “labours of love,” from fanzines, cassettes and performance initiatives, in which subcultural participants move across the lines of consumers or fans and producers. The Internet has provided the platform for the development of such subcultural and fan cultural activity, initially through chat boards and forums, and now increasingly through mainstream social media outlets.<sup>553</sup> Beyond musical subcultures and into mainstream music culture, today’s music fans often undertake a form of culturally productive labour in their fandom. A notable example is the phenomenon of individuals posting cover versions of popular songs on YouTube. Some YouTube singers have managed to amass

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<sup>552</sup> Sections of this paragraph have previously been published in: Jared Davis, “Punk Preempts the Post-Popstar Age: Prosumption and Celebrity within Neoliberal Economics,” *Public Seminar*, entry posted November 1, 2016), accessed January 30, 2017, <http://www.publicseminar.org/2016/11/punk-preempts-the-post-popstar-age>.

<sup>553</sup> Abigail De Kosnik, “Fandom as Free Labor,” in *Digital Labor: The Internet as Playground and Factory*, ed. Trebor Scholz (New York: Routledge, 2013), eBook collection (ProQuest Ebook Central), 188.

substantial online streams and followers for an output that consists solely, at least initially, of covers of popular artists. A recent Australian example of this is the young singer Sabrina Schultz, whose YouTube cover of Men At Work's 1981 track "Down Under" was subsequently purchased in 2017 for use in a digital streaming television series.<sup>554</sup> Perhaps the most prominent example of a YouTube cover artist crossing over into success in their own right is the hugely successful American pop singer Justin Bieber, whose career began after being noticed on YouTube for his cover versions of popular pop and R&B artists Ne-Yo and Alicia Keys.<sup>555</sup>

Self-expression among likeminded individuals is the impetus for participating in online fan communities. In some fan cultures—as was the case with the punk movement—resistance to the dominant market is valued as a form of subcultural capital.<sup>556</sup> For some artists such as Hill, sharing content for free is a specific political position rooted in a separation from commercial interests. In the digital sphere, this can relate to creative commons licenses and the open source movement. For others, a popular ideology of "doing it for the love" has meant much creative labour is unpaid, or undervalued.<sup>557</sup> The nature of subcultural activity feeds into this ideology. As discussed earlier, quite often, due to the symbolic nature of subcultural capital, commercialisation of fan and subcultural activity is shunned.<sup>558</sup> This is particularly true of discussions around the aforementioned notion of indie authenticity. As new media scholar Abigail De Kosnik notes: "Because fans generally conceive of their activities as 'resistive' to consumerism, they refuse to consider that their works [...]"

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<sup>554</sup> Maddelin McCosker and Kirrin McKechnie, "Brisbane Singer Lands Music Deal with YouTube Cover of Down Under," *ABC News*, Tuesday August 22, 2017, accessed December 25, 2017, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-08-22/brisbane-woman-sabrina-schultz-you-tube-down-under-music-video/8827980>.

<sup>555</sup> William Gruger, "51 Million and Counting: YouTube Star Ali Brustofski Works to Jump from Covers to Success with Her Own Songs," *Billboard* 125, no. 26 (July 6, 2013): 26.

<sup>556</sup> Thornton, 6.

<sup>557</sup> McRobbie, *Be Creative*, 111.

<sup>558</sup> Sections of this paragraph have previously been published in: Jared Davis, "Zero Interference: Today's Artist Fan Relationship," 3hd Festival, November 2015, accessed January 30, 2017, <http://3hd-festival.com/2015/posts/jared-davis>.

might be deserving of compensation, either from official producers or from other consumers.”<sup>559</sup>

De Kosnik draws a link to fan labour and the 2005 observations of Tiziana Terranova, who noted in online communities a tendency towards unpaid labour. Terranova’s initial example of this was America Online (AOL) volunteer chat room moderators working without pay for the pure pleasure and satisfaction of building online communities. De Kosnik further adds the example of fans maintaining communities on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube in their leisure time.<sup>560</sup> Terranova’s contention with regard to online and digital labour is that labour becomes visually subordinated, more ephemeral, but that it does not disappear entirely.<sup>561</sup>

In the context of contemporary DIY music practice, the use of platforms such as SoundCloud and Myspace by musicians such as Hill can in a sense constitute a form of “free labour” in Terranova’s terms. As noted by De Kosnik, their free labour is the trade-off for the pleasure of communication and exchange, of participating in a community.<sup>562</sup> Terranova develops her notion of free labour by engaging with the Lazzarato’s concept of immaterial labour. Immaterial labour, in Lazzarato’s words:

On the one hand, [...] refers directly to the changes taking place in workers' labor processes in big companies in the industrial and tertiary sectors, where the skills involved in direct labor are increasingly skills involving cybernetics and computer control [...] On the other hand, [...] immaterial labor involves a series of activities that are not normally recognized as “work” — in other words, the kinds of activities involved in defining and fixing cultural and artistic standards, fashions, tastes, consumer norms, and, more strategically, public opinion.<sup>563</sup>

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<sup>559</sup> De Kosnik, 199.

<sup>560</sup> Ibid., 202.

<sup>561</sup> Terranova, *Network Culture*, 90.

<sup>562</sup> De Kosnik, 201.

<sup>563</sup> Lazzarato, 133.

So firstly, immaterial labour relates to the increasing centrality of communications and information technologies in contemporary labour. Secondly, it is forms of activities previously thought of as leisure, but which add value to products and drive the consumption cycle. Among these, we find subcultural participation and music fan labour: participating in forums, engaging with musicians through social media, mixes, YouTube covers, playlists, SoundCloud reposts and shares. So too the labour of artists online such as Hill can be found.

While Hill's practice demonstrates a connection to a lineage of DIY practices of previous experimental musicians through the use of cassette technology and zine culture, Internet platforms complicate the DIY musician's relationship with media. As outlined, today a DIY musician in a local community such as Melbourne shares the same media space as major record label musicians. Where on the one hand they are using the tools of the day that are available to them—and digital media allows for a greater networking reach than prior media—Internet platforms work to actively encourage and coopt the creative labour of users. The “everyone is an artist” ethos is a means to encourage users to continue “prosuming.” For social media platforms, the value of this communication is its creation of cultural value, or at times a form of subcultural capital, playing on users' desires to communicate their individual self-expression among their communities. With immaterial labour's ever-increasing prominence, consumers are ideologically expected to continually communicate their individual tastes, to “share” by posting daily updates to friends on their everyday comings and goings.<sup>564</sup> Recall Lazzarato's suggestion that despite its rhetoric of freedom, this new ideology is in fact authoritarian: “one *has to* express oneself, one *has to* speak, communicate, cooperate, and so forth.”<sup>565</sup>

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<sup>564</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>565</sup> Ibid., 134. McKenzie Wark offers a critical reading of Terranova and Lazzarato, in which he is reluctant towards the term “immaterial labour”, thinking of digital labour and information in materialist terms. He argues that as capitalism is in a new phase, this should be taken into account when Marxist frameworks are applied, as with the post-Marxism of Lazzarato and the Italian autonomists. For Wark, in an informational society, the ruling class of the day ultimately owns the infrastructure of the Internet, through which surplus value is extracted from the labour of its users. This is Wark's concept of the “vectoralist” class as discussed earlier in my thesis,



This has implications for the way in which music is distributed in the digital age, and within the digital media space that is increasingly shared between DIY musicians and the major record labels. Consider the Connect function of the Apple Music streaming service for instance. Connect introduces a social media platform in which artists can have a direct line of communication to fans, and fans to artists.<sup>566</sup> While in early usage Connect does not have the sophistication of established social media services like Twitter and Instagram, or even SoundCloud, the very fact that this function seems a necessary inclusion to a contemporary music streaming service highlights the communicative nature of contemporary music consumption. Here Apple's model is to own the means of communication between artists and fans. Hence this communication is increasingly essential: it allows the present day elite to extract rent not only from users listening to music, but also from their fandom. With the consumer's increased freedom to communicate, to become subjects, comes the clause that this freedom is rented out to the consumer by those who own the means of communication for their own capital accumulation. In this self-organised consumption, individuals may more readily choose what to listen to and create their own communities, but in doing so continue to make the decision to consume. Thus in this climate, major tech corporations wish less and less to define what specific content to consume or share, so long as they continue to do so using their platforms.<sup>567</sup>

The cooptation of musician's labour for such purposes is something that Hill consciously works to counter in his practice. For one, Hill works across platforms with a practice that is flexible to changes that platforms might implement for monetisation, such as advertisements. Hill also uses platforms in unconventional manners, such as

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who control the "vectors" along which information travels. This is a useful concept in considering how DIY music-making, rather than being considered a form of leisure in the downtime of individuals outside of work hours, can now become a means to extract value by way of online music sharing platforms. For instance SoundCloud is a for-profit online platform that allows users to share music for free, or with subscription accounts, and monetises the labour of users through these subscriptions or through advertising. Wark, *A Hacker Manifesto*, [032].

<sup>566</sup> Porch.

<sup>567</sup> Sections of this paragraph have previously been published in: Davis, "Zero Interference."

the *Endless Lonely Planet* Vine project. In other instances, where possible, Hill customises the platforms he uses to remove advertising or branding, such as through his design customisations of Google's Blogger platform. Hill's website for instance, [www.christopherlghill.com](http://www.christopherlghill.com), has been developed using the Blogger platform, however Hill has edited the page's code to remove a standardised Blogger branded header bar that appears across Blogger sites usually. Furthermore, Hill has given the page's template an unconventionally wide width. Hill is conscious of the pervasiveness of the culture of neoliberalism and the subsequent inability to avoid participation in this culture as a contemporary artist.<sup>568</sup> Likewise in a recent interview he has acknowledged how a DIY creative practice in the present is in some ways compatible with the culture of neoliberalism, and its emphasis on entrepreneurial self-expression.<sup>569</sup> This acknowledgement reflects the tendency I have discussed earlier in my thesis on the wants of left wing anti-conformist politics in some ways converging with those of the nascent right wing neoliberal politics by the end of the 1970s. In response, Hill proposes in his practice what I would liken to a method of "tactics" like that of Michel de Certeau. This is evident in Hill's aforementioned use of the term "friendship," which he borrows from political philosopher Todd May, as a model of relation between individuals.<sup>570</sup> Hill suggests: "Friendship poses a resistance to neoliberalism, because it refuses neoliberalism's push to make all relationships about economics."<sup>571</sup> Therefore, "friendship" offers an alternate use-value for music outside of market exchange. However, on the other side of the coin to such alternate value systems of community building is the potential for the exploitation of a creative practice in the form of "free labour" in Terranova's analysis.

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<sup>568</sup> Hill, "Freedom and Association," viii.

<sup>569</sup> Hill, interview by Davis.

<sup>570</sup> Hill, "Freedom and Association," 22.

<sup>571</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

## Hill's practice and collaborative authorship

In Hill's practice, whether online or offline, authorship is something that occurs collaboratively. The collaborative authorship of music subcultures and how style is developed collectively is a good prior indicator of the current trajectory towards creating in groups. Hill's physical exhibitions are also indicative of this logic, which lends itself particularly to online practice. Musician Brian Eno has conceived of the term "scenius," to describe exceptional moments of creativity taking place not due to individual "genius," but rather through the collective work of a creative scene. In Eno's words: "Genius is individual, scenius is communal."<sup>572</sup> Eno's notion of the scenius is a useful term in describing how despite the individualist rhetoric of the present under neoliberalism, creative communities like Hill's develop content in an inherently collaborative fashion. The *Endless Lonely Planet Vine* account for instance, creates a communally developed logic to very short six-second content that taken individually might read somewhat incoherently. The coherence of the posts is strengthened through the multitude of the contributions. Such is true also of the image blog Jah Jah Sphinx. The blog tends to develop its own internal visual language among the artists that post on it, with certain visual motifs and themes beginning to recur across the ongoing blog posts. Read together, the posts on Jah Jah Sphinx make for a sort of collective visual dialogue.

In his 2015 essay "Authentic Sharing," Rob Horning discusses the way in which contemporary "sharing economy" businesses operate around such a rhetoric concerned with human interaction, community building and generosity. Horning gives the example of "sharing economy" businesses such as Airbnb, in which homeowners rent out their properties to visitors while Airbnb collects a fee for their facilitation of the exchange. These services focus on catering to their consumers' desires for such

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<sup>572</sup> Stuart Jeffries, "Surrender. It's Brian Eno," *The Guardian*, April 29, 2010, accessed Wednesday February 1, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2010/apr/28/brian-eno-brighton-festival>.

“authentic” experiences.<sup>573</sup> There is a distinct marketing rhetoric employed by such businesses that distances its practices from that of a commercial service. For instance Airbnb’s position that its users are able to join a local community, rather than being a commercial tourist, with its slogan “Live There.”<sup>574</sup>

While “sharing economy” companies exploit this tendency, the fact that collective sentiment provides an impetus for consumption speaks to the inadequacy of an individualist ethos in our contemporary sociality. This creates a need for a new collectivity explored in the practices of subcultural participants and music scenes, such as the DIY music practices examined in this thesis. Hill’s use of Internet platforms for his various music practices demonstrate the way in which music scenes have adapted to Internet platforms in order to develop communities built around collective sentiments, such as that of aesthetic, political or subcultural concerns.

## Conclusion

Christopher LG Hill is an artist who makes use of Internet platforms in a way that both works with as well as challenges their intended purposes. Hill’s work uses Internet platforms for the distribution of music in a manner that follows a lineage in Melbourne and Australia of artist-led networks developed through fanzine mailing lists and the cassette culture, as with *Fast Forward* cassette magazine. In doing so, he is exemplary of the DIY ethos’ development into the contemporary moment. Hill’s practice foregrounds the use-value of music in community building and collectivity over its exchange-value. His practice, like the indie community discussed in Chapter Four, operates with a value system for which commercial interests are seen as diminishing music’s authenticity.

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<sup>573</sup> Rob Horning, “Authentic Sharing,” *The New Inquiry*, February 6, 2015, accessed June 23, 2016, <http://thenewinquiry.com/blogs/marginal-utility/authentic-sharing/>.

<sup>574</sup> Airbnb, “Live There,” accessed February 1, 2017, <https://www.airbnb.com/livethere>.

The will to “do-it-yourself” and become a musician or artist, rather than simply a consumer, is a predominant mode of consumption via today’s “Web 2.0” platforms and “prosumption.” What was once a radical sentiment in punk and artist communities, one that sought to challenge the passive consumption of mass culture, is now a central pillar of neoliberal consumption. Technology, via user-led developments and hacks, not simply through top down corporate strategies, has played an integral role in people’s communications and consumption in the case of the Internet. As predicted by Enzensberger, it was technology and media that allowed for consumers to themselves become producers, a form of what Attali foresaw with his concept of “composition.” For musicians, and consumers becoming musicians, the free sharing of creative content initially grew with the punk DIY ethos and the eventual adoption of the cassette tape. However it was the MP3 that vastly accelerated the potentials for creative content sharing, and a new greater ease for musicians to have their work reach an audience directly without a record label. Hence for a new generation of people in the 2000s and 2010s the phrase “do-it-yourself” became even more accessible. Peer-to-peer sharing, growing rapidly with the popularity of the MP3, helped to familiarise a reciprocal and sharing-based nature of the Internet for users. This made the Internet for many a place to send and not just receive content, prior to the arrival of social media and streaming. Since the 2010s, the free sharing of content via social media has become imperative to contemporary consumption via the Internet.

For DIY musicians in 2010s Melbourne such as Hill and his peers, artists must navigate an increasingly globalised media space. This media space is one in which the “two different worlds” binary of independent and mainstream, evident in Melbourne’s musical underground of the late 1970s and 1980s, is gradually blurred.

## Conclusion

In today's decentralised and digitally mediated music communities, musicians in Melbourne and elsewhere regularly make use of entrepreneurial, self-publishable and distributable ways of using media. These are modes that have in turn been translated from older forms of media such as cassettes and mail networks. It is no longer simply the outliers of Melbourne's underground creative communities that participate in DIY creative practices. Mainstream social media exemplifies a similar model of user-generated content. In stark contrast, during the early 1980s it was still remarkable when 3RRR radio hosts Bruce Milne and Andrew Maine played a host of cassettes sent to the station by Australia's burgeoning DIY post-punk communities. Not content with the local broadcast range of the station, which could only reach inner metropolitan Melbourne, the presenters then founded *Fast Forward* cassette magazine to widen the music's reach, sending cassettes nationally and internationally via mail networks. As I have argued, *Fast Forward*, along with other proponents of DIY music's 1980s cassette culture, forged new possibilities for the potentials of media to turn music listeners into producers themselves.

In this thesis I have argued that DIY experimental and independent music cultures in Melbourne have made forward-thinking and new uses of media that in turn have been prescient of wider cultural change to come. In considering the ways in which DIY music cultures develop new ways of using media and technology, I suggest a counterargument to Attali's concern that music, commodified by the 1970s, had been stripped of its ritual value. As such, I argue that with the present digital DIY economy in which independent musicians make use of social media, DIY musicians develop content not for its exchange value. Rather, they do so for free for subcultural capital and a value system that foregrounds authenticity. This is a model of ritual value that is bound up in the DIY musician's discourse around authenticity, expressed through a particular privileging of amateurism.

In Chapter One I outlined the theoretical context and critical frameworks for my thesis, articulating the way they pertained to my case studies. In this chapter I provided both a global and local Melbourne context for the theoretical concerns of my research, as well as an initial political backdrop and context for my first case study during the late 1970s in Melbourne.

In Chapter Two I examined how the Clifton Hill Community Music Centre was a significant site for the early development of postmodernism in Melbourne in the years between 1976 and 1983. I considered the links between the nascent punk DIY ethos and the reception of post-structuralist and postmodernist French theory in its English translations in Australia. The chapter examined the period in Melbourne of the late 1970s and early 1980s as a point of origin for the ethos and ideals that would serve as the basis for the remainder of my thesis.

In Chapter Three I discussed Melbourne's globally influential *Fast Forward* cassette magazine, which ran from 1980 to 1982. I analysed *Fast Forward* in order to argue for cassette culture marking a pre-digital turning point in a new paradigm shift in consumption. Namely, the shift towards a focus on the *platform* and user-generated content, away from a focus on the mass production and sale of content itself. *Fast Forward* was an exemplary use of cassette media that further put into action the call to arms of the punk DIY ethos. The magazine was a platform for musicians to cut out the intermediary figures of major record labels and reach a wider national and even international audience for their music. This in turn was preemptive of the globalised user-generated content of the digital age, emerging in decades to come.

In Chapter Four I analysed "indie" music culture in Melbourne in the 1990s, specifically through the lens of the Chapter Music and Spill record labels. In doing so, the chapter considered the particular notion of indie "authenticity" in Melbourne's DIY music communities, and the subcultural capital associated with the "lo-fi" aesthetic. I also examined the use of recording technologies and media by indie musicians, and further considered the ritual aspect to indie music subcultures. Contrary

to Attali's comments on the end to a ritual character in music, in indie music culture a notable valuing of aura is evident. This is seen both through the ritualistic spectatorship practices of live music, as well as the authenticity imbued on recorded music objects through the lo-fi aesthetic. This discourse around authenticity adds to discussions around the reorienting of value and creative labour in the 21st century, as discussed later in my thesis.

In Chapter Five I examined *Gooley On The Inside*, arguing that the DIY initiative provided publishing and presentation opportunities to people marginalised from existing music scenes in Melbourne at the time. In particular, this case study explored *Gooley On The Inside* in the context of the development of social media platforms such as Myspace in the mid-2000s. I considered how feminist DIY musicians have played a part in developing the activist potential of digital media, as well as the significance of the Internet-enabled "bedroom artist" for contemporary music practice. In this chapter I examined how *Gooley's* uptake of Web 2.0 extends upon prior bedroom artist practices in feminist subcultural practices, and their emphasis on private spaces of cultural production rather than more public sites. In addition, I considered how a foregrounding of the private sphere evident in the neoliberal digital consumption of Web 2.0 complicates such subcultural feminist practices.

Finally, in Chapter Six I considered the work of Christopher LG Hill and specifically his use of Internet platforms. While in other chapters I had focused on scenes, record labels or performance events, this chapter consciously moved its focus towards an individual. This was in order to consider the blurring lines between the individual and collectivity in the digitally mediated present. In this chapter I considered DIY music culture's prescience of contemporary user-generated content, or "prosumption," in the digital age. I analysed the phenomenon of "prosumption" and user-generated content on Internet platforms such as YouTube and SoundCloud, considering how these platforms relate to Hill's practice. In this chapter I argued that the Internet platforms that enable contemporary DIY music practice are indicative of a shift tracked throughout this thesis, from an emphasis in the culture of consumption from content to



the platform, as first seen in Chapter Three with the cassette. In using the example of Hill's practice, I argued for the renewed importance of music's use-value for the contemporary DIY musician—namely, its role in developing a sense of community among its participants. Thus I examined in Hill's practice a DIY value system that ascribes a degree of authenticity to that which is not bound to commercial interests.

### **Noise to signal: theoretical arguments and findings**

For Attali, music culture develops new “codes” that are at first unrecognisable or “noise.” What is initially noise becomes recognisable, a new code that in turn signals cultural changes that are to occur more broadly. My thesis has provided new scholarly research into Melbourne DIY experimental and independent music practices. and In doing so, my analysis has considered the prescience of DIY music practices in Australia of broader cultural, political and economic changes. Most specifically, I have analysed how DIY music practices preempted the culture of user-generated consumption in the digital age. My thesis has sought to understand the crucial role of media in music culture, and the agency of musicians in determining new ways of using media. Where music cultures pioneer new ways of using media, in turn these developments are adopted by culture more generally.

The consensus of my arguments regarding music's predictive qualities is reflected in discussions on art and culture more generally. Media theorist Marshall McLuhan noted in the introduction to the Second Edition of his 1964 book *Understanding Media*: “The power of the arts to anticipate future social and technological developments, by a generation or more, has long been recognized.”<sup>575</sup> As in the concerns of McLuhan, my thesis emphasises the important relationship between the arts as forecaster and its media—a relationship that I have sought to expand further in my arguments. McLuhan is well known for his argument that the medium is culturally the message, in that media brings about cultural changes that people do not anticipate or are not yet aware

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<sup>575</sup> Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, ed. W. Terrence Gordon (Corte Madera, CA: Ginko Press, 2003), 16.

of at the time of any new medium's introduction. This argument does not necessarily negate the agency that I have afforded to Melbourne DIY musicians' use of media in my thesis, as McLuhan himself further comments that artists are able to "encounter technology with impunity" as they are experts in being aware "of the changes in sense perception."<sup>576</sup>

In 1984, cultural theorist Fredric Jameson famously identified a link between the postmodernist cultural tendencies emerging in art and architecture and the economic shifts into a post-industrial society occurring at the time.<sup>577</sup> That same year, Jameson wrote the introduction to the English translation of Attali's *Noise*. Jameson likewise saw in Attali's analysis a kinship with other thinkers at the time tracing the shift to a new post-industrial form of capitalism. Characteristic of this new form was a "shift on the technological level from the older modes of industrial production of the second Machine Revolution to the newer cybernetic, informational nuclear modes of some Third Machine Age."<sup>578</sup> In the digital age of the 21st century, this informational and cybernetic "Third Machine Age" is no longer nuclear but fully formed. Jameson, identifying Attali as a French socialist economist, outlines that Attali however is not among "complacent celebrators of 'post-industrial society' in the United States."<sup>579</sup> Rather, Jameson recognises in Attali a will for "concrete possibilities of social transformation" within the "new (American) multinational order."<sup>580</sup>

Writing nearly two decades later than Jameson, with a more "celebratory" tone regarding the potentials of post-industrial capitalism, Lev Manovich observed how such changes are apparent in new media. In 2001 Manovich wrote:

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<sup>576</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>577</sup> Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review*, no. 146 (1984): 53-92.

<sup>578</sup> Fredric Jameson in Attali, *Noise*, xii.

<sup>579</sup> Ibid., xiii.

<sup>580</sup> Ibid.

If the logic of old media corresponded to the logic of industrial mass society, the logic of new media fits the logic of the postindustrial society, which values individuality over conformity.<sup>581</sup>

Unlike the Marxist frameworks of Jameson and Attali, Manovich's comment here is chiefly concerned with the linguistic and formal characteristics of media, and the ways in which users interact with it. He goes on to comment: "In a postindustrial society, every citizen can construct her own custom lifestyle from a large (but not infinite) number of choices."<sup>582</sup> Naturally, such a comment brings to mind the neoliberal tendencies of digital consumption that I have discussed in my thesis. Manovich's analysis is primarily a formalist one, with no critique of the political implications of this new post-industrial logic of media.

Caleb Kelly has linked Manovich's argument to music, considering platforms such as iTunes and the iPod that, in his words, "allow users to construct the soundscape to their lives."<sup>583</sup> As discussed in Chapter Two, the way in which experimental musicians make use of media is central for Kelly. Musicians making use of "cracked media" is likened by Kelly to what Michel de Certeau calls "tactics," or adapting to one's social environment in everyday life not by a greater structural change, but by "making do."<sup>584</sup> Further to this, Kelly comments that de Certeau's "tactics" is in some ways a similar concept to the "composition" of Attali discussed above, noting:

The approaches taken by the practitioners of cracked media can be understood to preempt future shifts in culture and society. If we are currently in a society that seeks the singular and individuality of media, that is, media arranged by us and consumed when we want it—YouTube instead of commercial television, blogs instead of best sellers—then the manner in which old media was taken

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<sup>581</sup> Manovich, 41.

<sup>582</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>583</sup> Kelly, 314.

<sup>584</sup> Ibid., 287.

apart to produce new individual media is a precursor to current societal trends.<sup>585</sup>

Here Kelly's argument overlaps directly with the concerns of my thesis. However, reading experimental music practices against broader political and societal trends is not the key concern in Kelly's text. The focus of Kelly's concept of "cracked media" is concerned mainly with the creation of new musical languages and aesthetics, rather than the way musicians' innovations in using media is further adapted into new means of communicating and social organisation. My thesis has not focused so much on aesthetics in my analyses of my case studies, as Kelly's does in greater detail. Rather, my focus has been on the way in which the Melbourne examples of my case studies preemptively found new ways of using media that in turn have been adopted across culture more generally.

### **Speculations for future research**

It must be acknowledged that the vast majority of practitioners in my case studies were practising during their twenties. While my thesis addresses these practices through the lens and tradition of subcultural studies, a field that is largely concerned with youth culture, the question of youth's role is beyond the scope of what I have addressed in this thesis. Further research might consider the question of youth culture and the significance of how youth factors into the arguments I have made. A more sociologically oriented study might, for instance, pay attention to the changing means by which musicians are able to earn income. In the 1970s in Australia, it was relatively easy and common for artists to draw on unemployment benefits. This changed dramatically in the 1990s and as discussed, inner city rents have also skyrocketed. As a result, young artists are now required to juggle various part-time jobs to pay the rent and survive. This is likely to have had a material effect on the kind of music and

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<sup>585</sup> Ibid., 314-315.

communities that artists produce and participate in, and could form the basis of a future study.

Given that my project focuses on music's potential to forecast coming societal and cultural changes, there are a number of questions raised for future speculations that can be read from present day globalised digital music culture. One of which is the way that a new digitally mediated form of collaborative thinking will continue to expand across society more broadly. In Chapter Six I discussed similar notions of collaborative authorship in music scenes, and ultimately such authorship's mediation through technology. Philosopher Franco "Bifo" Berardi has likewise recently discussed such collaborative thinking through the lens of digital technology and its effects on our aesthetic experience. In particular, Berardi outlines what he terms a "mutation of sensibility"<sup>586</sup> with digital culture, where sensibility is ability to decode the signs and codes of experiences that are not reducible to language.<sup>587</sup> Berardi's text considers the effects on sensibility of the insertion of digital technology into human experience. One of the implications of this mutation of sensibility in the digital sphere is a new logic of collective thought, with cognitions guided by the logic of a "swarm-like" mentality.<sup>588</sup>

For Berardi, given our experience is mediated and understood through language, subsequently with digital media's incursion into daily life, our experience is connected to the language of digital media. This has implications for politics and structures of power in the digital age. Berardi's argument adds a further political dimension to the formalist approach of Manovich, who has discussed an algorithmic cognition defined by digital media. Manovich notes:

Before, we would read a sentence of a story or a line of a poem and think of other lines, images, memories. Now interactive media asks us to click on a

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<sup>586</sup> Franco "Bifo" Berardi, *And: The Phenomenology of the End* (South Pasadena: Semiotext(e), 2015), 38.

<sup>587</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>588</sup> Ibid., 29.

highlighted sentence to go to another sentence. In short, we are asked to follow pre-programmed, objectively existing associations.<sup>589</sup>

There is a degree of technological and algorithmic influence to the way in which DIY music cultures can develop online. On platforms such as SoundCloud and YouTube, associations between artists are inevitably guided somewhat by the algorithms of the platform (through artists and song or video suggestions). Subsequently, such collective thinking in turn provides a negative model for persuasion by whom McKenzie Wark terms the “vectoralist” class, or the new information technological elite of digital tech companies.

Major music streaming platforms such as Apple Music and Spotify charge subscription fees for users in order to act as conduits for the content of both major entertainment companies (such as Universal, Sony, etc) as well as independent labels and artists. Increasingly, these platforms have managed to monopolise the distribution of music content online, or the “vectors” in which communication can flow in Wark’s terms. What’s more, digital streaming platforms do not provide neutrality of access to their services. In major streaming platforms this is exaggerated even further.

Increasingly, streaming platforms such as Spotify and Apple Music push a culture of curated playlists and recommended music selections that largely represent the content and interests of the major entertainment industry.<sup>590</sup> On major streaming platforms and their culture of major record label dictated playlists, we see a return to tastes of individual consumers being shaped by the mass music industry.<sup>591</sup> These platforms demonstrate the way in which a mass culture tendency, in a sense “broadcasting” playlists to large swaths of users, has adapted into the digital age. This highlights the tension inherent within the logic of digital media. On the one hand digital media and Web 2.0 is presumed to favour the individual over conformity, but on the other hand

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<sup>589</sup> Manovich, 61.

<sup>590</sup> Liz Pelly, “The Secret Lives of Playlists,” *Watt, CASH Music*, June 21, 2017, accessed December 25, 2017, <https://watt.cashmusic.org/writing/theseconlivesofplaylists>.

<sup>591</sup> Attali, *Noise*, 111.

the guidance of algorithms is an ever-present factor. With the intervention of digital platforms into contemporary sociality, community and collaborative authorship of ideas may seem to develop organically. However, as major digital streaming platforms demonstrate, the algorithms can become skewed and weighted.

At the time of writing, one platform with a focus on independent artists and user-generated content, SoundCloud, faces uncertainty regarding its future security. Reports published in July 2017 show that the company was running towards bankruptcy on the back of laying off almost forty percent of its workforce.<sup>592</sup> Platforms such as YouTube still allow a degree of ease for user-generated content and it could be speculated that YouTube may likely fill the void should SoundCloud close. Though undoubtedly YouTube is still affected by the weighting of algorithms and subsequent siphoning of users towards sponsored content. Future studies could allow for a better understanding of these coming changes to music sharing platforms.

Social media platforms, with the “swarm-like” community building and tribalism of their users, likewise have broader implications in contemporary politics. Much recent analysis has considered the role of social media in the US election in 2016 of Donald Trump, whose campaign played on collective sentiments, fears and faith at times in lieu of facts. The fact that the term “post-truth” entered popular usage in 2016 in order to respond to this condition is indicative of this trend (the term was dubbed Oxford dictionary’s 2016 “word of the year”).<sup>593</sup> The “swarm-like” collectivity apparent on social media was capitalised on in the 2016 US Presidential Election campaign by a new culture of Internet meme producing white nationalists who have dubbed themselves the “alt-right,” a name that suggests an alternative, even subcultural face for far-right politics. Prominent American white nationalist figurehead Richard

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<sup>592</sup> Josh Constone, “SoundCloud Sinks as Leaks Say Layoffs Buy Little Time,” *TechCrunch*, July 12, 2017, accessed December 25, 2017, <https://techcrunch.com/2017/07/12/soundshroud/>.

<sup>593</sup> Oxford Dictionaries, “Word of the Year 2016 is...,” Oxford Dictionaries, accessed January 5, 2018, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/word-of-the-year/word-of-the-year-2016>.

Spencer popularised the term.<sup>594</sup> In developing a unique terminology and aesthetic through the use of Internet forums such as 4chan and Reddit, the alt-right was credited with further stoking the popularity of Trump during his presidential campaign. This was a fact that Trump played into himself, by controversially reposting on Twitter an Internet meme image that had been created by members of the alt-right.<sup>595</sup>

Theology scholar Tara Isabella Burton has pointed to the ritualistic element or religiosity to even secular members of the so-called alt-right. In drawing a similarity to the ritualistic sociality of alt-right forum users and their pseudo-religious language, Burton comments:

Religion often functions in this sense as a kind of dictionary: a compendium of symbols and their meaning that also allows for shared communal discourse: a “language” of stories we tell one another about our selves and our world.<sup>596</sup>

While the subjects of her study are a far cry in terms of political affiliation to the music cultures discussed in my thesis, such a shared communal discourse outlined by Burton is precisely how online music subcultures in the present might be described. For the contemporary DIY musician, this “language” is expressed through ritual performance of sharing online, creating cassettes as ritual objects with “aura” or the “participatory spectatorship,” to use Wendy Fonarow’s words, of live gigs.<sup>597</sup> My thesis has argued that there exists a renewed status of the ritual character in music for which music’s ritual character had been lost. Further research may expand upon the question of the significance of ritual value and creative subcultures, with contemporary digital culture more generally.

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<sup>594</sup> Angela Nagle, *Kill All Normies: The Online Culture Wars from Tumblr and 4chan to the Alt-Right and Trump* (Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2017), 52.

<sup>595</sup> Tara Isabella Burton, “Apocalypse Whatever: The Making of a Racist, Sexist Religion of Nihilism on 4Chan,” *Real Life*, December 13, 2016, accessed March 16, 2017, <http://reallifemag.com/apocalypse-whatever>.

<sup>596</sup> Ibid.

<sup>597</sup> Fonarow, *Empire of Dirt*, 22.



Melbourne's DIY music community is exemplary of the changes to musicians' use of media over the four decades 1976 to 2016. In observing these DIY musicians' use of media, observations about culture at large become apparent. McLuhan once famously quoted the poet Ezra Pound, who claimed that the artist is "the antennae of the race."<sup>598</sup> This comment is raised in relation to McLuhan's observations of the artist's prescience of coming cultural change. Such a quote is poignant for McLuhan as it is for my research, for in it is implied a fundamental relationship between the artist and their technology and media ("antennae"). The image of the antenna as it was for Pound—in its partial function of receiving rather than sending information—is now an antiquated part of the old broadcast media. Today, as it has been now for several decades, musicians have been closer to the two-way radio of Enzensberger's observations—sending as well as receiving. In my thesis I have analysed local Melbourne DIY musicians who have adopted forward-thinking ways of using media, preempting significant cultural shifts towards a globalised digital media sphere. As I hope I have shown, we can learn much about culture at large by observing the signals that musicians send.

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<sup>598</sup> McLuhan, 16.

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