The Importance of Counter-Culture in Art and Life

by

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B.A., University of Victoria, 2009

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Supervisory Committee

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Abstract

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Punk rock provided not only a watershed of creativity, innovation and a do-it-yourself spirit to a culture saturated in the mainstream, it physically brought like-minded people together in a community, or rather extended family, which in today's hyper-d.i.y. culture, is progressively declining. As early as the 1940s, theorists such as Adorno and Horkheimer warned us about alienation in a society increasingly dependent on technology. By looking to punk, and other resilient and robust counter-cultures, perhaps we can find solutions to the pitfalls of the 'culture industry' (Adorno, Horkheimer, 1944). My thesis, consisting of a feature-length documentary film and textual analysis, is a culmination of: ethnographic research into the punk scene in my own community; theoretical research into the sociology, ethnography and subculture theory; and my own subjectivity. My personal findings are presented to offer insight into punk philosophy and to spur discourse, rather than deliver an objective account or didactic reproach.

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Chapter 1
Introduction: Alienation, Globalization and Community

With the advances in technology and the democratization of the arts, today more than

ever we live in a do-it-yourself culture where anyone can be a filmmaker, artist and/or

music producer. Youth and adults alike not only consume the streams of information,

images and commerce that is readily available to them over the World Wide Web, but

they can share –in the same space— their own visual, audio, and textual productions.

New digital technologies and mobile devices are permeating our homes, work sites,

schools, and public spaces. Is the global replacing the local? The Internet's profound

dominance over all aspects of society has many theorists concerned about its effects on

our interrelationships, identities and culture. The extreme shift in the way we

communicate, and the way art and information is being produced, disseminated and

consumed, has created 'much anxiety about the ways in which the computer appears to

isolate and depersonalize human interaction' (Sefton-Green, 2013). The unprecedented

egalitarianism in art —which has far surpassed the revolutionary accomplishments of

counter-cultures such as punk, avant-garde and Dada, who redefined the conventional

relationships between economics and aesthetics, producer and consumer, artist and

audience, and art and life; and who made attainable to ordinary citizens what was once

only available to the affluent and specialized— brings with it many benefits, but at what

cost? Albert Borgmann, in his book *Across the Postmodern Divide* (1992), asserts that

ICTs (Information and Communication Technologies) are creating a hyper-reality in

which we are losing touch with our bodies, with nature and with one another.[1] This anxiety echoes earlier sentiments of post-Marxist thinkers, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer of the Frankfurt School, who felt individual freedom, autonomy and creativity were threatened by modern technology and who theorized, "Technical rationality today is the rationality of domination, the compulsive character of a society alienated from itself".[2]

There are differences in opinion however. Julian Sefton-Green, author of *Identity, Community, and Learning Lives in the Digital Age,* believes increased usage of technology and social media in 'not-school' spaces (the home and community) increases opportunities for creativity, art and global engagement. Futurist, Alvin Toffler also extols the merits of technology, but at the same time he warns that as our technological powers increase, 'side effects and potential hazards also escalate'.[3] Whether a technophobic or technophilic perspective on cyber-culture, it is an undeniable fact that we are experiencing a 'Great Transformation' (Kellner, 2006: 2,47), a radical reshaping of social communication, epistemology, ontology and culture. We must proceed carefully to avoid the possible pitfalls and ill effects on community, family and self-identity –what social scientists have been alerting us to for years. I believe it is prudent for us to investigate cultures that have enjoyed diversity, self-sufficiency, authentic expression and longevity for insights into the preservation of culture and genuine identity.

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[1] Langman, Dahms, et. al, *The Evolution of Alienation* (U.S.A., Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2006) p. 50.

[2] Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments* (U.S.A., Leland Stanford Junior University, 2002) p. 95.

[3] Toffler, Alvin, *Future Shock* (Canada and U.S.A., Bantam Books, 1970) p. 429.

The purpose of this thesis is two-fold: 1) to investigate empirical matters surrounding human agency, community, capitalism, commercialism and alienation, by researching the local punk subculture in my community and; 2) to fill gaps in subculture theory, which has up to now focused primarily on delinquency (Chicago School), class struggle (Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies), style and semiotics (Hebdige, 1979), by concentrating on aspects of counterculture I believe to be integral to humanity, personal growth and a well-functioning community; aspects that merit further philosophical and sociological consideration, particularly in this age of globalism.

A qualitative research method of inquiry was utilized for this thesis. Data was: collected through field research (interviews and participant observation); coded for thematic patterns; contrasted and compared to homologous movements such as Dada, avant-garde and underground film collaborative 'no wave cinema' and then; further analyzed (with an *all is data* functionality) to develop inductive premises. Both etic and emic logic are applied to the analysis of data collected to: a) account for the empirical substantiation of the participants (emic); b) account for my own reflexivity as researcher (etic); and c) to promote a more intuitive/organic, rather than overly systematic, progression towards probable postulations that aim to encourage further questioning and heuristic discourse.

Outcomes of the research methodology are presented in two independent, yet connected mediums: a feature-length documentary film, entitled *Somewhere to Go,* that reports empirical experiences with and observations of members of the punk community in Victoria and; a textual component that discusses my methodological processes and inductive findings. I will begin by discussing the milieu in which my research is situated.

Chapter 2
The Age of Self Production: D.I.Y. in the Digital Age

"Modern mass culture, aimed at the 'consumer', the civilization of prosthetics, is crippling people's souls, setting up barriers between man and the crucial questions of his existence, his consciousness of himself as a spiritual being."

-*Andrei Tarkovsky, Sculpting in Time (1986:42)*

The last several decades have seen exponential and unprecedented advances in technology, and today more than ever it is important for us to carefully consider the significance of Tarkovsky's words (shown above) as well as other past warnings regarding social alienation by philosophers such as Marx, Adorno and Horkheimer. Current scholars share the same anxieties. Astra Taylor, in her book, *The People's Platform, Taking Back the Power and Culture in the Digital Age*, states: "We are at risk of starving in the midst of plenty… open systems can be starkly inegalitarian", a "laissez-faire system will inevitably underinvest in less profitable cultural works, no matter how worthy, enriching, or utterly vital they are". (Taylor, 2014: 214, 219)

The expansion of broadband, the increase in mobile devices and our growing reliance on The World Wide Web has led to a surge of Internet users –nearing three billion[4] who have easier-than-ever access to data, entertainment, commerce and social media than ever before. The Internet is a seemingly endless bricolage of virtual artifacts –artifacts that reflect/affect our cultures, values and identities. Consumer software allows anyone to

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[4] "The Internet Society: Global Internet Report" 2014, www.internetsociety.org/sites/defualt/files/Global_Internet_Report_2014.pdf

create, and share (worldwide) films, photographs, and musical/textual compositions. The "dialectic between public and private produces new problems about who 'owns' the self, its image, and its location."[5] (Sabean, 1996). "The rise of the internet has increased the ability to compile, store, search, mix, match, copy, distribute, or otherwise manipulate, change, or exchange personal information in increasingly large networks of databases."[6] People are ignorant to what happens to their information and for what purpose. Facebook and other social media provide a platform whereby individuals can report, edit and publish their personal opinions and topics of interest with their friends, but in turn, these 'news feeds'[7] can be used for target marketing and 'narrowcasting',[8] thereby perpetuating and proliferating the hyper-commercialism that already exists.

Digital technology is the ideal conduit for mass media and mass communications. It surpasses, or rather assimilates, all prior mass media. We can now read e-newspapers, e-books and magazines online. We can engage in e-commerce and have instant access to TV and radio programming, films, music and video games. Our increasing reliance on the Internet, the Internet's growth as a vehicle for mass media, and the decreasing diversity of the controlling media corporations, gives alarming power to this medium. The media

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[5] Sabean, David Warren, *Production of the Self during the Age of Confessionalism* (Central European History, Vol. 29, No. 1,1996) p.1

[6] Howard, Philip and Steve Jones, Society Online (California, Sage Publications, Inc. 2004) p. 276

[7] "Facebook Is the Largest News Organization Ever," last modified March 11, 2011, http://blogs.hbr.org/cs/2011/03/facebook_is_the_largest_news_o.html)

[8] "The Narrowcasting Network," last modified March 13, 2014, http://www.mobilenomix.com/blog/narrowcasting-network

oligopoly, having become highly concentrated through mergers and buy-outs, consists of a handful of media conglomerates that are enjoying less competition than ever before. They are driven by capitalism and dominate nearly 75% of the world's media.[9] Choices become more limited for citizens when mainstream content, geared toward appealing to the largest possible demographic, becomes increasingly hegemonic and controlling, over even alternative and 'laissez-faire' sources of information. Public *good* (culture) is increasingly financed by private money. "There is no such thing as public Internet: everything flows through private pipes"[10] (Taylor, 2014). For example, Google Books, who tout their selves a 'universal library', is primarily a platform for capitalistic advertising. The dominance of these corporations shapes public opinion and influences our values and beliefs. "We pay dearly for the services and culture we consume online through the opaque, private tax referred to as advertising (and we pay with our privacy)."[11]

So on one hand, the Digital Age offers egalitarianism in art and new opportunities for grassroots creativity (active usage), but on the other it is inegalitarian; it limits creativity and diversity by representing the interests of a minority elite and cultivating false psychological needs (passive usage). Two of the earliest critics of mass media, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer theorized, "the consumer, as the producer, has no sovereignty. The *culture industry*, integrated into capitalism, in turn integrates consumers

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[9] Lule, Jack *Globalization and Media: Global Village of Babel* (UK, Rowan and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2012) p. 75.

[10] Taylor, Astra *The People's Platform: Taking Back the Power and Culture in the Digital Age* (Canada, Random House Canada, 2014) p. 224.

[11] Ibid., p. 229.

from above".[12] This 'integration from above', as well as the integration of passive and active Internet usage has a profound effect on society and in turn the arts and the individual.

In a 2012 article for *Psychology Today*, Dr. Jim Taylor writes: "new media is causing the externalization of children's self-identity. The result of this externalization may be your children developing a *false self*, in which they internalize the messages of popular culture and media, such as valuing themselves based on their wealth, appearance, or popularity, and those messages become the foundation of their self-identity". People are free agents but they also are affected by the structures of their social environments. Vanessa May, author of *Connecting Self to Society*, presents her view on social reality as "one of '*enmeshment*' that does not posit dualisms such as personal/social and everyday life/social structure".[13] She thinks it best to look at people's lived experiences, their personal interactions, and their formation of self, as the *collective* fabric of society. She also believes the inherent human need to belong is of fundamental importance to a sense of self: "an individual's sense of belonging is affected by collectively negotiated understandings of who 'we' are and what 'we' stand for, and who gets excluded as the 'other'"[14]. She further narrows down her point of departure by focusing on how our bodies and specifically our senses provide an important link between the self and society, and are constitutive elements of belonging and identity.

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[12] Held, David *Introduction to Critical Theory: Horkheimer to Habermas* (California, University of California Press, 1980) p. 91.

[13] May, Vanessa *Connecting Self to Society: Belonging in a Changing World* (UK, Palgrave MacMillan, 2013) p.37.

[14] Ibid., p. 3.

The Internet does enable new opportunities for people to connect, participate and create/share locally and globally –every level of communication is possible and language is no barrier, yet virtual communication remains two-dimensional and depersonalized. It lacks embodied, face-to-face interaction and denies us the use of our full range of senses –the determinants of our identity. "Because we experience the world through our bodies, the link between self and society is always embodied. As a result, our sensory experiences of the sights, sounds, smells and feel of our surroundings constitute an important dimension of belonging."[15]

I believe we can learn from anti-capitalist, pro-veridical countercultures like punk, Dada, avant-garde and no wave cinema, who eschewed commercialism, elitism, capitalism and hegemonic dominance in order to create more genuine and meaningful artworks that promoted participation, collaboration, ingenuity, self-sufficiency, freedom of expression, diversity, and richness of culture. They strove for and achieved a degree of democratization in the arts by avoiding entrapment into the 'culture industry', and although they were often seen as alienating themselves from society, they in fact engaged society with their defiance. Not only did they form an organized and collaborative local system but they also demonstrated to 'outsiders' alternate ways to live life other than following the dictates of mainstream, capitalist, mass culture. Their rebellious attitude produced an array of innovative and expressionistic artworks that reflected/affected authenticity, diversity and innovation –important aspects of human evolution and robust, multivalent cultures. "Music, dance, festivals, and other public expressive cultural

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[15] Ibid., p. 131.

practices are a primary way that people articulate the collective identities that are fundamental to forming and sustaining social groups, which are, in turn, basic to survival."[16] Punk and other revolutionary counter-cultures have exhibited behaviours that are integral for personal and cultural identification. We can gain insight from their collective achievements to divert further alienation in our culture industry.

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[16] Turino, Thomas *Music as Social Life* (Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 2008) p. 2.

Chapter 3
Unraveling Truths: a method to the madness

Fieldwork was the most essential empirical tool for the qualitative research undertaken

for this study and included informal interviews, participant observation, and

conversations with friends and acquaintances. Data collection was carried out in an emic

('insider' or 'bottom-up') approach, a process that takes as its starting point the

perspectives and words of the research participants. It 'investigates how local people

think' (Kottak, 2006), how they behave and how they perceive the world around them,

and is useful for its potential in uncovering unexpected findings. Research and data

analysis took more of an etic ('outsider' or 'top-down') approach where meaning arises

from inferences made by the researcher. Local observations and themes were interpreted

and developed with an *all is data* logic, a fundamental property of grounded theory,

where key concepts are subjectively compared to and contrasted with concepts outside

the local setting being studied. Grounded theory method observes and analyzes empirical

data *before* theoretical hypotheses are made. Inductive reasoning is used to extrapolate

probable premises, premises that may or may not be certain but can be used as a point of

departure for further investigation. This chapter introduces why qualitative research

methodology was appropriate for this thesis and briefly discusses each element's

constitutive role.

3.1 Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is a postpositive method of inquiry used for understanding human

experience, behaviour and perceptions. It downplays dry statistics and focuses rather on

subjectivity and emotionality. It is often used to study abstract or complex phenomena where hypotheses are not determined in advance but are developed empirically, through data analysis and coding, and may be broadened to theorize beyond the initial scope of the study. An important aspect of qualitative research, particularly in an ethnographic study, is fieldwork. Fieldwork is characterized as the collection of data within the natural environment of the subject. It includes interviews, participant observation and discussion.

3.3 Interviews

Interviews were the greatest source of data collection for this thesis. As a method for conducting qualitative research, face-to-face discourse is beneficial for building trust with participants and creating an intimate atmosphere in which to discuss personal information, read body language, and build on or clarify details of what is being said. When possible, settings representative of the interviewees' characters were chosen to capture, on camera, nuances of their respective personalities. Semi-structured, informal interviews were often held in the interviewee's home, workplace or local pub. Impromptu interviews also occurred, sometimes in a nearby alley where a gig was taking place.

Interview questions aimed to be exploratory rather than leading to facilitate the emergence of previously unconsidered topics and to allow for contrasting viewpoints. Questions were often steered towards specific areas of interests but were kept open-ended to avoid suggesting a particular answer. For example, instead of asking 'Were/are live shows a cathartic experience?' I asked, 'How did/does playing on stage make you feel?' This approach is more conversational in style, and is beneficial for collecting a wider variety of information and for interviewing a diverse group of people. Interviewees often

introduced new topics for consideration and recommended other key informants for future interviews. This is known as chain referral, or snowballing, and is an important aid in qualitative research.

3.3.1 Participant Observation

Participant observation is a form of data collection typical of the qualitative research paradigm. The researcher enters the natural 'social field' (Bourdieu, 1979) of the community being researched and takes part in events and activities to gain familiarity and a better understanding of the practices, customs and 'habitus' (Bourdieu, 1979) –the everyday experiences and lifestyle of the subject. Body language, behaviour and personal interactions –important signals of communication— can be observed and assessed for clues into attitude and states of mind, all which can aid in theory development or support existing arguments.

While attending live punk gigs, I not only observed/videotaped from a distance but also joined in the excitement by entering the mosh pit and climbing up on the stage. As an active participant, I became part of the generated energy of the event and was able to capture, on camera, the immediacy of the activities from the point of view of a subculture member. This 'insider' approach does not however indicate that I consider myself to be an insider. I also do not consider my positioning to be that of an outsider either. As a local musician myself, I was already familiar with many of the participants and had even played in bands with several of them. Reflexive acknowledgement of my positioning (between familiarity and strangeness) and subjectivity within the research process underscores the variable nature of qualitative analysis and reflects the influence my

proximity to the subject had on the theoretical trajectory. My familiar positioning as a researcher is contrary to the participant observation methodology advocated by the Chicago School of Sociology, which asserts a critical distance is required to achieve extensive insight and understanding of the group under study (Hodkinson, Deicke; Rhoda MacRae 2007:53). It is more in keeping with the grounded theory school of thought that abandons "mid-century assumptions of an objective external reality, a passive, neutral observer, or a detached, narrow empiricism" (Charmaz, 2014:13) and takes the "researcher's position, privileges, perspective, and interactions into account as an inherent part of the research reality" (Charmaz, 2014:13).

3.1.1 Grounded Theory

Grounded theory is a methodology used in the social sciences. It espouses the formulation of hypotheses through the analysis of empirical data and inductive reasoning, in a reverse engineered manner, rather than the traditional style where research and data analysis is carried out in support of pre-existing hypotheses. With grounded theory, results originate from linkages made in the data –a process known as coding— and are expanded into abstract conjectures. While postpositive qualitative theory generally retains the notion of objective truth, grounded theory and particularly constructivist grounded theory is presented as relative and probable, rather than uncontestably certain. It is characterized by its reflexivity, flexibility and multiplicity.

Originally developed in the late 1960s by Barney Glazer and Anselm Strauss (of the Chicago School), grounded theory took the pragmatic qualitative research methods of the Chicago School to a new level by 'legitamiz[ing] qualitative research as a credible and

rigorous methodological approach in its own right. It evolved over the years and eventually branched out into two schools of thought: objectivist grounded theory (Glaser, 1978, 1992, 1998), which has positivistic leanings; and constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2000, 2002, 2005, 2006), which adheres to a relativist epistemology. My process with the analytical aspect of this thesis employs the latter.

3.1.2 Constructivist Grounded Theory

Constructivist grounded theory "takes into account the researcher's positionality in combination with that of the research participants" (Charmaz, 2014). Theory is therefore not simply *discovered* from the analysis of data as much as it is pragmatically *constructed*. Relativism and multiplicity are recognized as part of the research process. It does not claim *tabula rasa* but rather acknowledges prior knowledge and theoretic preconceptions. It is a reflexive and iterative approach but the words of the participants provide the fundamental starting point for the research and remain the most integral source of material for conceptualization and theory advancement.

3.4 Data Analysis

Interpretive analysis of text is usually a ***qualitative analysis*** of ***qualitative data*** where 'you tell the story, as you see it, of how the themes are related to one another and how characteristics of the speaker or speakers account for the existence of certain themes and the absence of others' (Bernard, 2006). Qualitative analysis involves representing people with words, the words of the researcher.

As mentioned earlier, data collected from interviews and memoing (note-taking) was

categorized into patterns and meaningful themes, a procedure known as coding. Emerging categories were heuristically constructed into plausible theories, theories that muse possibilities more so than they affirm truths. Both etic and emic logic were used for this process, but rather than the traditional (top down) approach generally associated with cultural anthropology –which asserts individuals are shaped by their culture— I implement more of a social anthropological style, or bottom-up approach, where the personal everyday lives of the participants is of greatest importance. Emic logic asserts that what was being said by local participants is of utmost importance. An etic approach is where local observations, themes and interpretations of data are developed in accordance to what the researcher considers relevant and germane to larger social paradigms and further academic study.

Chapter 4
Punk Rock: What can we learn? (AIMS)

Individuality, the true factor in artistic creation and judgment, consists not in idiosyncrasies and crotchets, but in the power to withstand the plastic surgery of the prevailing economic system which carves all men to one pattern.

- *Max Horkheimer (1968)*

Punk rock, and similar revolutionary movements like Dada and underground filmmaking collaborative no wave cinema, had to carve out their niche in society by rejecting the fixed paradigms of capitalist society, modern technology and homogenized mass media. By creating their own means of production, and discovering practical solutions to material, economic and social constraints, they made available to the ordinary citizen that which was once only accessible to the affluent and specialized. They defined their own terms, resisted conformity and found a new freedom where genuine expression, ingenuity and self-sufficiency were paramount. They redefined relationships between economics and means of production, artist and audience and art and life. Not only were much needed changes made in the art and music industry, in terms of egalitarianism and innovation, but people were inspired to develop personally, morally and socially as well. Their convictions toward the excesses of bourgeois culture, capitalist domination, and the homogenous mainstream became a lifestyle and mode of conduct, not just a music genre or art form.

4.1 Victoria Punk

Early punk in Victoria was particularly unique. Although it shared commonalities with scenes in other cities, it was different because Victoria is "somewhat isolated from the

rest of the world" and did not have the "cliques and the business side of things like Vancouver did" (John Wright, 2012). "It was small town" (Ken Kempster, 2012) and kids as young as twelve or thirteen years old, many from middle class suburban families, were involved in the scene. "It really reflected the culture of where people grew up, you know it was like, here it was middle class white kids, suburban kids with all this crazy energy and then you have the far more politically active Europeans… it's not just the music but it represents either an anarchist political idea or a communist philosophy" (J. Wright, 2012). So although the rebellious, socio-political bands of London and New York inspired Victoria youth, it was largely the raw and defiant fervor of the touring (predominantly west-coast) punk bands like D.O.A. and the Dead Kennedys that came to town that motivated them. Kev Smith of the *Neos* speaks of seeing Black Flag for the first time: 'Our jaws were on the floor in awe' and 'then we realized…anything was possible'. He relates that much of what he was listening to before the inception of punk was "unsatisfying" and "irrelevant." Musicians referenced their own "rock star world;" lyrics did not "speak to him." With the arrival of punk, songs were finally about everyday events to which he could relate. Punk also wiped away the notion that one had to be a virtuoso on his/her instrument to play in a band and perform on stage. It offered "something different" (Prohom, 2012), something attainable. Youth could even meet their idols, "they weren't some rock star that you could never get near" (Henderson, 2010). Scott Henderson recalls partying with members of the band *X* when they came to town from L.A. "You could talk to the people that blew your mind" (McNeil, 2012). Carolyn Mark recalls making dinner for Green Day before they became mainstream rock stars.

Punk took expression to its limits and inspired a new energy in those dissatisfied with the monotony of mainstream culture. It released youth from the confines of convention and empowered them to create their own raucous energy. "It was like, and we can do it too!" (Kerr, 2010). "Everyone formed a band" (Henderson, 2010). "You didn't think, ok what kind of band do you what? What kind of music should we play? It was like, you get a bass, I'll get a guitar, somewhere we'll find a drummer, and we'll form a band… and that's what we did!" (laughs) (Andy Kerr, 2010). This d.i.y. ethos of punk was central to its philosophy, it was the "greatest thing about it and it still stands today, and I think that punk had a huge influence on people's lives and really taken them on a path to discovering who they are. I don't think it's an easy path though you know, I think that if you're going to do it yourself, it's going to be hard" (Flower, 2012). Rob Nesbitt describes the punk scene as a "place that allows you to try things and see how you feel about things, and maybe even you're trying on a persona that might actually be the real you, might develop into being a more real you. It's a place that's accepting and supportive and allows you to be all these different things at different times, without question, you know. It's a safe place" (2013).

4.2 Freedom of Expression, Social Interaction and Self Identity

'Community', in the sense of a 'sharing of life or of action or of interests, an associating or coming together,' is a 'social good' which develops through the freedom of expression.

- Richard Moon, 1985

In his article, *The Scope of Freedom of Expression*, Professor of Law, Richard Moon discusses how freedom of expression is not simply important for self-development but is

a vital component for social interaction, and community as a whole. He states, "Freedom of expression is not granted at the expense of 'community' or social solidarity. On the contrary, the freedom is essential to the achievement of these ends. Freedom of expression is all about the coming together of individuals and the good that comes with social interaction." In this way, punk rock was, and continues to be, significant to society for its espousal of freedom of expression.

To "think for yourself and do it yourself, those are the two really enduring things that I got out of it" (Kev Smith, 2012). Punk was not just a call for individual agency however; it was a call for social action. Kids had to work together to form bands, rent halls and equipment, make posters, start 'zines, and organize recording etc. They learned to exchange their talents and strengths to overcome the economic and material restraints of the times. These enterprising individuals were competent, cooperative, and collaborative. They supported each other and acquired strategies for making things happen, vital strategies of endurance and survival that set the stage for their futures. "A lot of the people who were doing that, that I know of, have their own businesses now… they use to have great bands, and maybe still do, but they also have their own businesses and stuff, that ethic is *in* them" (Tolan McNeil, 2012).

Punk aided youth in developing their identities and finding a place for themselves in society. It offered an alternative milieu for like-minded people who felt alienated from orthodox hegemony to express their individuality while at the same time to enjoy a sense of belonging and solidarity. Their unique alliance and common beliefs were articulated through their fashion, behaviour, music and performance. Their community spirit was

enhanced due to the simple fact they had to *go out* to shows to see the music they liked.

They could not hear this music on the radio or watch performances on YouTube. They

physically engaged with one another and communicated through body language. Slam

dancing, crowd surfing and stage diving were regular occurrences at live shows. "Music

was just part of it" (Kerr, 2010). "It was enjoying the life of the music and the life that the

music provided for everyone in the sense of their social life and the fun and the

inspiration. You feel like you get the inside joke you know, you're in on it and all these

other people don't understand, you know you feel there was something special about it"

(J. Wright, 2010). Music facilitated the rise of a like-minded community and led to a

plethora of artistic, personal, social and musical pursuits.

4.2.1 Music

*Music does bring people together. It allows us to experience the same emotions. People
everywhere are the same in heart and spirit.*

- Henry David Thoreau

Music, like language, is a communal rather than a solitary activity. It has been an inherent

and ineradicable part of humanity since prehistoric times and can be found in every

culture and every time period. Where individuals gather, there is music. Hymns are sung

in church as prayer, anthems begin sports events in patriotism and solidarity, rallies use

music to inspire allegiance; music is heard at weddings, funerals, birthdays and every

other aspect of daily life. It is a primal and powerful form of communication, an

international language that unifies diverse people and provides a basis for both self-

knowledge and social involvement.

In her book, *After Adorno: Rethinking Music Sociology*, Tia DeNora discusses how music

is not distinct from society. She states that socio-musical studies is "not about how

society can be found 'in' music at all but about how music is simply one way in which

we do that which we end up *calling* social action." Music inspires initiative, promotes

participation and encourages the expression of deep emotion, especially where words fall

short. Lecturer and author, Christopher Small asserts, "The essence of music lies not in

the musical works but in taking part in performance, in social action… music is thus not

so much a noun as a verb, 'to music'. He describes the meaning of '*musicking'* thus:

> It is not only in the relationships between the humanly organized sounds that are
> conventionally thought of as being the stuff of music, but also in the relationships
> that are established for the duration of the performance between the participants with
> the performance space. These sets of relationships in turn stand for, or model, ideal
> relationships in the wider world outside the performance space, relationships
> between person and person, between individual and society, humanity and the
> natural world and even the supernatural world, as they are imagined to be by those
> taking part in the performance. Those are important matters, perhaps the most
> important in human life (1995).

Andy Kerr of Nomeansno has the same perspective about Victoria punk: "There wasn't

really a distinction between the band and the audience, um, maybe some drama was being

played out between some couple that was breaking up over here, was just as much of a

part of the scene as the person who drank too much and was throwing up in the corner, as

was the bass player who had just broken a string… um, as was the cops who were coming

by to shut down the show because it was too loud. All those things combined to make a

scene and that's why it's called a scene." "The choice of musicking may not be done

consciously or deliberately, but it is never a trivial matter. It reflects always an

individual's, and a society's, quest for those right relationships which most of us spend

our lives seeking" (Small, 1999). Steve Bailey of the *Neos* says he was depressed and

unhappy in high school until punk came around. He is grateful to punk being the "only good thing" in his life and for getting him through a tough year at school. "When you play with other people, there's a connection you make. You're all working this force that's coming out of this group of people, and it's just a different feeling than anything else I've experienced… it was like a (pause) spiritual experience!" (Bailey, 2012). "When it clicks it's really satisfying, you know, and there's this sort of collective energy that builds" (Kev Smith, 2012).

Thomas Turino, in his book *Music as Social Life: The Politics of Participation,* discusses how music (and dance) are "so important to people's understanding of themselves and their identities, to the formation and sustenance of social groups, to spiritual and emotional communication, to political movements, and to other fundamental aspects of social life... public presentations of the deepest feelings and qualities that make a group unique."

4.2.2 Dance

> *Without music, life would be a mistake…. I would believe only in a God who knew how to dance.*
> *- Friedrich Nietzsche*

Music and dance affect individuals and community in powerful ways. Punk music, with its no-holds-barred code of behaviour, facilitates unbridled freedom of expression, heightened energy and sensual levels, intense physical interaction between people (i.e., slam dancing, stage diving and pogoing), and communication through music, the senses and body language. There is no division between band and audience (Kerr, 2010; Smith, 2012): one is as performative as the other. Musicologist, Carl Dalhaus calls this "social

action, which is to say performance, [is] central to the experience of music" (Small, 1999).

Dance in general, has a positive impact on people of all ages, races, and social classes. It is important to local community life. Like music, it aids us in our negotiation of personal and cultural identity. It has even long been used as a means of therapy for treating a range of mental and physical illnesses from depression to Parkinson's disease. The American Dance Therapy Association defines dance (movement) therapy as "the psychotherapeutic use of movement as a process which furthers the emotional, social, cognitive, and physical integration of the individual" (2009). One engages in a multi-sensory experience where the heart beats faster, breathing intensifies, and smells, visuals and energy combine to create a corporal experience that develops one's identity, memories and social interactions. Self-expression through body movement is simultaneously the expression of identity (Hetherington, 1998).

4.3 Community

Society does not consist of individuals but expresses the sum of interrelations, the relations within which these individuals stand.
- Karl Marx

Youth *inadvertently* created their own local community, or rather 'family' (McNeil, 2012) or 'tribe' (Warren, 2012) by coming together and engaging in positive practices that freed them from the mundane reality of mainstream life. "We were just a bunch of kids… it was a small town and there wasn't anyone around saying oh you know I think we could really set up a Victoria scene and make some money out of this. They were kind

of doing that in Vancouver but over here it was just like, let's play a show and we can rent some gear…" (Kempster, 2012) "…and my mom can sew the curtains!" (laughs) (McNeil, 2012). The 'scene' formed organically. "We weren't consciously striving to make a scene at all. You meet other people who like the same kind of music and a scene grows out of that, it doesn't… it's not like a confab where people have a business dinner and go 'let's figure out how to get a scene'" (Holliston, 2012). Steve Bailey explains that punk led him to a whole new group of people who wanted to "think a little bit deeper about things than just wander[ing] through life." Kids supported one another. Steve Bailey discuss the influence the older members of the scene (namely Rob and John Wright) had on them, "They encouraged us when we were lousy, they helped us record, they came out to our shows, they were always so positive, you know". Kev Smith replies, "Oh ya, they would record us for free, and come to our shows and make live recordings, and they were just so supportive. It was brilliant. I could go over to his [Rob's] house anytime and sit down at the kitchen table and we'd hang out for two hours and we'd just talk about shit, and… I think it was a real positive. It was way, way different than I would ever have encountered otherwise… there was none of that in my school or anything".

Tolan McNeil of bands *Onionhouse*, *Gus* and *Pigment Vehicle*, says that apart from the bowling lane –where you might get beat up anyway— "there was nothing for kids to do here, there still isn't anything for kids to do here and there certainly wasn't back then, and if you didn't look the same, or act the same, or if you were an outsider in any way, you were truly fucked here… so it was really great that somehow the truly 'fuck-ed' got together in these places like the OAP Hall or in basements. It's kind of a miracle that occurred." Jason Flower has similar sentiments: "I think that those Friday night all-ages

shows were a haven for us, they were that place, they were that little utopia where we could feel free to be who we were, to express ourselves… and um, not abide by any set of rules of how you had to do anything" (2012).

The community network that arose from the energy of punk was composed of people with diversified interests who took the initiative to create, innovate and sustain their selves as a composite working unit. "It was like a confluence of all sorts of different people who had different interests in various forms of the arts" (Holliston, 2012). "There's an artistic component, there's an exciting component, and a musical component, a social component, so it was all these things… it was something artistic that you could get out there, and if you were just watching the band, you could just jump up and down, you could be part of the show" (Kempster, 2012). Music aided in the development of social, artistic and entrepreneurial pursuits; basement recording studios, indie record labels, 'zines, comics, cassettes and fashion all became part of the scene, creating a sustained subcultural network of trade, commerce, art and culture. "Through moving and sounding together in synchrony, people can experience a feeling of oneness with others. The signs of this social intimacy are experienced directly –body to body—and thus in the moment are felt to be true. Social solidarity is a good and, in fact, necessary thing. We depend on social groups –our famly, our friends, our tribe, our nation—to survive emotionally and economically and to belong to something larger than ourselves" (Turino, 2008).

Rob Wright discusses music's integrality to community:

People have been making music long before they built houses, or grew food, or

maybe even talked, and it's a way people bind together as a community. It's a way they share their hopes and fears and emotions, and their bodies, and in that sense it's a very valuable thing to do. It's a very good thing to do for people. It's like baking bread or building houses. It has its own reward, and if someone's inspired by it, great but if I get up and play a show and people have a great time, basically my job is done. I've done everything I needed to do. I can go home, sleep soundly, get up and do it again the next day, and as long as I can do that I know at least I'm doing something worthwhile.

Chapter 5
Conclusion: Identity through Music, Community and Subversion

Disobedience, in the eyes of anyone who has read history, is man's original virtue. It is through disobedience that progress has been made, through disobedience and through rebellion.

−Oscar Wilde

The very nature of human identity and social relations are changing with the advances of technology. Computer software and the World Wide Web have fostered the democratization of art/knowledge to global proportions, but what effect does this have on local community, culture and self-identity? Public spaces, work places, universities and homes are filled with individuals operating computers and mobile devices for the purpose of entertainment, virtual communication, producing and consuming. Kids and adults alike often choose to be at home on their computers than out with friends and family. A colleague recently relayed an account of her 9-year-old son's neighbouring friend who, being very shy, prefers playing multi-player video games alone in his bedroom than playing with his friends outdoors. Is it not through our corporeal, sensory experiences that we develop emotionally and gain a sense of self and sociability? Is engagement with the world becoming fragmented, depersonalized and homogenized? The social, personal and cultural implications of our increasingly commercialized 'global village' are yet to be fully realized.

Intersubjectivity is integral to the longevity and progression of any culture or community. Music, dance, art and diversity aid in creating pockets of local spaces where one can engage in empirical experiences and express his or her respective individuality while also feeling a sense of belonging, purpose, support and camaraderie. The phenomenon of

punk has spanned over three decades and continues to influence people and countercultures around the world. Its endurance as a movement and its positive impact on peoples' lives reflect its worth as a subject of philosophical and sociological consideration. By exploring the positive aspects of subversive practices I believe we can gain beneficial insights into issues of alienation, cultural and personal identity, and authentic expression. Thomas Turin writes, "overvaluing differences and undervaluing the basic sameness of people—survival can once again be threatened. Study of expressive cultural practices like music and dance from different societies can help us achieve a balance between understanding cultural difference and recognizing our common humanity".

Although subversive practices are often frowned upon and considered alienating, unpalatable and disruptive to the flow of the mainstream –in fact, the moniker 'punk' has historically been used pejoratively to describe degenerates and hoodlums— many scholars believe a rebellious spirit is necessary for growth and integral to progress. By subverting convention, one is able to free oneself and one's art from the confines of hegemonic ideology to achieve unrestrained authentic expression in both art and life. Generating from an undisciplined mode of conduct and a do-it-yourself ethos were vanguard innovations, intuitive output, genuine expression and an *empirical* community spirit that was central to a way of being in the world. "The people I got to know through punk rock, it was never about the way they dressed or about what kind of music they were into, it was just that they had an attitude that is still important to have today, to question things, think for yourself, find out who you are, follow the path you want, not to just take whatever is being fed to you" (Bailey, 2012). "How we came to that idea was

probably through our musical taste, that's how it was expressed to us and we kind of digested it that way. So it's interesting how it goes from the one thing that's kind of a specific, you know teenage, you know super 'geeked-on' bands, obsessed with music thing, and now you can see how it had an impact on your whole life" (Smith, 2012).

"We were just a bunch of weirdos, hated by everybody except a small group of friends who accepted each other for who we were, and would do anything to support each other, taking joy in each others accomplishments, no matter how insignificant they may seem to the rest of the world. Those wonderful people stopped me from taking an early exit out of this often brutal world and I am thankful everyday that I had the great fortune to stumble across punk rock, its music and its people, to learn that there could be a world no matter how small where your community's good fortune could be you own" (Bailey, 2012).

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